From the introduction to Where We Live: Communities for All Ages 100+ Inspiring Examples from America’s Local Leaders, the third book in the AARP Where We Live series

“Some of the best ideas borrow from and build on what has been tried and tested somewhere else. Learning what others are doing could be just the spark needed to make a difference where you live.”

Praise for the 2018 edition of Where We Live

“The demography of our cities is and always will be a major factor of the decisions we make as mayors and the ways in which we engage with our communities. I’m grateful for the leadership and expertise of AARP as they’ve guided us in best practices and streamlined several processes for improving the lives of our aging population. As our cities grow and age, we will be prepared to put forth the best and most appropriate practices for our residents.”

— Steve Benjamin, mayor, Columbia, South Carolina

“Where We Live shows how, when you create a great city for an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old, you are creating a successful city for all people, 0 to over 100. I commend Nancy LeaMond and AARP for publishing this book to highlight the work that communities are doing and the power of the Experienced Class in neighborhoods, towns and cities.”

— Gil Penalosa, founder and chair, 8 80 Cities

Praise for the first edition of Where We Live

“Where We Live provides an organized set of ideas to spark change in communities across the country. This book shows how mayors in cities big, small, rural and urban have found countless ways to improve their communities for their aging population and all residents.”

— Mick Cornett, former mayor, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

WHERE YOU LIVE could be featured in the next edition of WHERE WE LIVE

Tell us about your community’s inspiring livability work. AARP.org/SharingLivableSolutions

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WHERE WE LIVE
COMMUNITIES FOR ALL AGES
100+ Inspiring Examples from America’s Local Leaders
2018 Edition

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AARP is the nation’s largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. With a nationwide presence and nearly 38 million members, AARP strengthens communities and advocates for what matters most to families: health security, financial stability and personal fulfillment. AARP also produces the nation’s largest circulation publications: AARP The Magazine and AARP Bulletin. To learn more, visit AARP.org or follow @AARP and @AARPadvocates on social media.

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Printed in the United States of America
Brenda, an empty nester, and Phoebus, a Ph.D. candidate from Greece, are housemates in her Boston, Massachusetts, home. (See page 25 to learn how such intergenerational duos are finding one another.)
Welcome to the third edition in the AARP Where We Live series. Over the past three years, we’ve shared hundreds of ideas that are making communities across the country great places to live for people of all ages — what we call “livable communities.”

AARP is proud to put a spotlight on what this livability revolution looks like on the ground, from city and countywide initiatives to small changes that make a big impact. Our goal for these publications has been twofold.

First, we want to spread the word about America’s changing demographics, what that means for the places we call home, and how the things that make communities better for older adults are the same things we all want and need, no matter our age.

On January 1, 2011, the baby boom generation began turning 65, and today the entire boomer cohort — nearly 75 million strong — is over age 50. By 2050, 1 in 5 Americans will be age 65 or older. This trend will be felt most at the local level. Major metropolitan areas across the United States — think Seattle, Las Vegas, Denver, Dallas, Nashville, Minneapolis and Orlando — are poised to see their 65-and-over population more than double by 2030 compared with 2010. Small towns and rural counties, already disproportionately older than other parts of the country, will get even more so. All of these communities need to be thinking about how to help older residents stay independent as they age.

Fortunately, the structures and services that support older residents also help their children and grandchildren thrive: transportation options; safe, affordable places to live; a community commitment to health and wellness; opportunities to stay engaged and productive.

Sidewalks and curb cuts are a simple and clear example. Whether you’re walking or in a wheelchair, pushing a stroller or riding a bike, these kinds of infrastructure improvements help people stay active and get where they want and need to go. That’s what building communities for people of all ages is about.

Our second goal is to make it a little easier to take action in your community. Some of the best ideas borrow from and build on what has been tried and tested somewhere else. Learning what others are doing could be just the spark needed to make a difference where you live.

The Impact of the Experienced Class

A new component in this edition of Where We Live is a focus on what we are calling the Experienced Class — people who enhance communities through their skills and life lessons, influence and involvement. As the public dialogue focuses a lot on the needs of older adults, we don’t give nearly enough attention to everything older adults contribute to their communities. To be sure, an aging society presents challenges in terms of providing viable services and supports, but there is also a lot of opportunity waiting to be tapped.

They’re an Economic Force

As consumers, older adults are a hot commodity. The over-50 crowd controls nearly 80 percent of U.S. net worth, and corporate America has taken notice. There are health clubs, online dating sites, and a host of other products and services that cater to older adults. Hundreds of millions of dollars in venture capital are flowing to companies creating new tools and offerings for older adults.

They’re in the Workforce

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, by 2024, people in the 65-to-74 and 75-plus age groups will represent the fastest growing segments in the U.S. labor market. The Kauffman Foundation reports that people in their 50s and 60s start businesses at nearly twice the rate of those in their 20s — and they do so for many reasons.

On the plus side, today’s older Americans are healthier, better educated, and living longer than prior generations. Many like their jobs and don’t see a need to leave the workforce as early as their parents and grandparents did. Instead, they see work as contributing to their well-being: “being active” and “keeping my brain alert” are the second and third most common reasons why people plan to work past age 65.

To be sure, this isn’t a 100 percent good news story. The top response for why people plan to stay in the workforce beyond age 65 is to generate income, and about 4 in 10 current retirees who have worked for pay after retirement did so to make ends meet.

Whatever the reason for staying on the job, experienced workers have a lot to offer — knowledge, professionalism and a strong work ethic that reduces employee turnover, to name a few.

They’re Civically Engaged

People age 50 and over are involved in their communities and with causes that are important to them. Three in four of them have volunteered in the past year. Their top motivations were giving back, making a difference for their communities and helping people in need. Such volunteerism can pay enormous dividends and is an untapped resource in many communities.

The civic engagement of older Americans extends to the ballot box. They are the largest voting bloc by age. In 2016, voters age 50 and over made up 56 percent of the electorate. Voters age 45 and over have made up more than 60 percent of the voting population in every midterm congressional election since 2006.

Older voters are more informed and more likely to vote early than other age groups. It’s not an overstatement to say that older adults often decide local elections. In fact, residents age 65 and over are 15 times more likely to vote in local elections than voters age 18 to 34.

Spotlighting the Experienced Class

In addition to highlighting projects and programs that are making a difference by building housing for all ages; providing more ways to get around; supporting health and wellness; inspiring community engagement; and creating thriving, productive communities (all of these are chapters in the pages that follow), this edition of Where We Live shines a spotlight on the contributions of the Experienced Class.

You will find several “Experience Matters” profiles that tell these stories. There are great examples of how older adults are volunteering their time and sharing their skills, whether it’s a neighbor teaching teenagers to sew at a Boys & Girls Club or a retiree who has recruited a neighbor teaching teenagers to sew at a Boys & Girls Club or a retiree who has recruited a

According to legend, pickleball was invented in the mid-1960s on Bainbridge Island, Washington, by parents seeking a game the whole family could play. In some communities, such as in Wisconsin’s Chippewa Valley (pictured), pickleball is muscling into locations once commanded by tennis. See page 55 for more about fun and fitness at 50-plus.
GETTING STARTED

A few definitions and details

With more than 200 articles and photographs featuring inspiring programs, people and places throughout the United States, Where We Live provides a look at how local communities of all sizes are working to become more livable for people of all ages.

As a nationwide organization, AARP is frequently a partner in the work being done, or has assisted in some way. Since you’ll repeatedly encounter the names of two AARP efforts, here’s what each is.

AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities

The age-friendly network encourages villages, towns, cities, counties and even entire states to prepare for the rapid aging of the U.S. population by paying increased attention to the environmental, economic and social factors that influence the health and well-being of older adults.

Membership in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities means that a jurisdiction’s elected leadership has made the commitment to actively work toward being a great place for people of all ages.

Participation requires a multistep process of improvement, including the creation and implementation of an action plan.

Membership is not an AARP endorsement, nor does it mean the community is, currently, “age-friendly” or a great place to retire.

At press time, more than 2,500 communities, including two states (see page 71), have enrolled in the network. AARP is the U.S. affiliate of the World Health Organization global network for age-friendly cities and communities. You can find the current list of communities in the AARP network by visiting AARP.org/AgFriendly.

AARP Community Challenge

Through this quick-action grant program, AARP is able to provide financial support for direct, local, quickly implemented livability programs and improvements.

These focused, action-oriented grants can be used to accelerate change in housing, transportation or public spaces. They also spark community engagement and new partnerships.

In 2017, for the first-ever AARP Community Challenge, AARP received almost 1,200 applications, resulting in a highly competitive selection process. Many of the projects are featured in Where We Live. A list of all 88 winning grantees can be found on page 128.

To learn more about the challenge, visit AARP.org/CommunityChallenge.

One More Detail to Share

By highlighting some of the many interesting and innovative livability programs and projects that are happening in communities nationwide, AARP hopes that readers of Where We Live will be inspired to replicate, adapt and/or advocate for doing similar work where they live — where you live.

For that reason, the headlines of the articles you’re about to read are calls to action to, for instance, Create, Build, Help, Enable, Allow, Rethink. If you or your community do any of those things and want to inspire others to do the same, let us know. Our contact information is at left and on the last page of Where We Live. ■

Getting Started

Step right in! Learn why on page 56.
What People 50+ Think About Where They Live

It’s been true in the past and — according to the 2018 AARP Home and Community Preferences Survey — it’s true today. The majority of people age 50 and over want to remain in their current home and community. That’s why AARP is working with local leaders and residents nationwide to make communities more livable for people of all ages.

77% agree with the statement

“What I’d really like to do is remain in my community for as long as possible.”

76% agree with the statement

“What I’d really like to do is remain in my current residence for as long as possible.”

13% of people age 50 and over predict that in the future they’ll likely move into a different home within their current community.

24% say they’ll likely move to a different community.

46% believe they’ll stay in their current home and never move.

17% aren’t sure what their future will bring.

Roughly 3 in 10 people age 50+ would consider someday sharing their home with another person.

(And the response was the same among all adults age 18 and older.)

“How important is it to you personally to have the following in your community right now?”

62% say it’s extremely or very important to have affordable housing options (such as active adult and assisted living communities, and those with shared facilities and outdoor spaces) for older adults of varying income levels.

61% say it’s extremely or very important to have special transportation services for older adults and people with disabilities.

66% say it’s extremely or very important to have policies to ensure that older adults can have an equal opportunity to work for as long as they want or need to regardless of their age.

63% say it’s extremely or very important to have jobs adapted to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

59% say it’s extremely or very important to have job training opportunities for older adults who want to learn new job skills or get training in a different field of work.

57% say it’s extremely or very important to have transportation to and from volunteer activities for those who need it.

53% say it’s extremely or very important to have a range of volunteer opportunities to help people perform better in their volunteer roles.

53% say it’s extremely or very important to have opportunities for older adults to participate in decision-making bodies such as community councils or committees.

50% say it’s extremely or very important to have a range of volunteer activities to choose from.

50% say it’s extremely or very important to have volunteer training opportunities.

48% say it’s extremely or very important to have volunteer training opportunities to help people perform better in their volunteer roles.

SAMPLE SIZE: 1,947 | SAMPLING ERROR: +/- 3.35% TO SEE THE COMPLETE 2018 AARP HOME AND COMMUNITY SURVEY, VISIT AARP.ORG/LIVABLESURVEY2018
Build Housing for All Ages

For years, much of our housing has been developed as, essentially, places where young adults live, places where families live, places where “senior citizens” live. These communities often exist in a parallel universe, each with its own forms of transportation, entertainment, recreation and health care. A truly livable community should and can be intergenerational. A truly livable community has a range of housing options, at various price points, from apartments to single-family dwellings. A truly livable community allows different types of housing arrangements, including cohousing, home-sharing and accessory dwelling units (e.g., in-law suites, backyard bungalows). A truly livable community has services that help people live independently and care for their homes. A truly livable community should and can be a lifelong home.

This one-bedroom house is officially referred to as an “accessory dwelling unit,” and it’s enabling a retired homeowner to remain in her home and community. (See page 17.)
Bring Back Missing Middle Housing

For too many households, the right type of house, in the right location, at the right price point can’t be found because it no longer exists.

Across the United States, there is a mismatch between the available housing stock and what the market wants and needs. This is partly due to shifting demographics, such as a rapidly aging population and shrinking household sizes, and partly due to the growing demand for walkable living.

However, communities and builders are recognizing the need for a shift in the way American homes are designed, regulated and developed. So-called Missing Middle Housing (pictured) is a critical part of the solution. Such residences are described as missing because very few have been built since the early 1940s due to regulatory constraints, the shift to auto-related patterns of development and financing challenges.

Where the structures do exist, they often go unnoticed because — and this is a good thing — they blend right in. Even though missing middle-style buildings contain multiple households, they are compatible in look and feel with single-family homes.

“Missing middle housing types are a great way to deliver affordable housing choices by design since they’re of a scale that most communities would support. But they can also hit higher-value niche markets,” says Daniel Parolek, founder of Opticos Design and the architect who coined the missing middle terminology.

The missing middle concept also enables housing conversations — even in communities that bristle at words like “density” or “multi-family.” Discussions can develop around questions such as “Where will your children live if they move back to the area after college?” “Where will downsizing empty nesters move when they need to be in a less car-dependent community?” “Where will new teachers or police officers who have moderate incomes be able to live?” The answer is missing middle housing.

Cincinnati, Ohio; Flagstaff and Mesa, Arizona; Kauai County, Hawaii; Beaufort County, South Carolina; and Decatur, Georgia, are among the communities that have identified their zoning codes as a barrier and are either modifying the largely use-based codes or replacing them with a form-based, place-based approach that will allow a mix of housing types and land uses. That way, for instance, a neighborhood or street can contain single-family and multifamily homes as well as, say, a small market within walking distance — so buying a gallon of milk won’t require a drive to the supermarket.

THE TYPES

- Duplex: Side-by-Side
- Duplex: Stacked
- Bungalow Court
- Carriage House
- Fourplex
- Multiplex: Small
- Town House
- Live/Work
- Courtyard Apartments

Learn more at MissingMiddleHousing.com
Imagine Flexible Housing

What if we built homes that could easily change as we change?

As part of a temporary exhibition titled Making Room: Housing for a Changing America, a 1,000-square-foot concept home, called The Open House, was built inside the National Building Museum in downtown Washington, D.C.

The innovative structure, a creation of architect Pierluigi Colombo, features interior walls that can be moved at the touch of a button, reconfiguring the home to the needs of its residents. The Open House contains an eat-in kitchen with a height adjustable cooktop and counter, two bathrooms (one with a tub-shower, the other with a foldaway, glass-paneled stall shower), a laundry room, three living areas that can convert into private bedrooms (and are equipped with "transforming furniture"), a walk-in closet and lots of smart technologies.

Over the course of the exhibition, which opened in November 2017, the museum used the house to present "three prototypical yet underserved households: roommates, a multi-generational family and empty nesters." The scenarios are described and depicted below.

\[ \text{The Roommates} \]
With three roommates, each can have a private, acoustically sound bedroom. The kitchen, laundry room and two bathrooms are shared. Or one roommate or couple gets the large room with a private bathroom, but can convert into private bedrooms (and are equipped with "transforming furniture"), a walk-in closet and lots of smart technologies. The kitchen, laundry and two bathrooms are shared. Or one roommate or couple gets the large room with a private bathroom, but can convert into private bedrooms (and are equipped with "transforming furniture"), a walk-in closet and lots of smart technologies.

\[ \text{The Extended Family} \]
To meet the needs of a multigenerational household, the walls can be arranged like the roommate scenario. Or the house can be set up as two studio suites with a shared kitchen. In this floor plan, the residents convert their living spaces into bedrooms with a grandma in the separate room, for instance, and a mom and child in the dividable larger space by opening sleeper sofas.

\[ \text{The Empty Nest} \]
A couple or individual can take over the entire house, which becomes rather spacious with a bedroom, living room and dining room or, instead, a home office. The house can also become two separate apartments, one of which could be rented or used by a caregiver. In such a scenario, the studio unit is accessed from a back porch doorway and a kitchenette is installed.

Say Yes to ADUs

Laws allowing accessory dwelling units help create needed housing for people of all ages

On June 1, 2017, communities throughout New Hampshire experienced one of the biggest housing policy changes in their state—or any state. On that date, a new law went into effect requiring that local zoning allow accessory dwelling units, or ADUs, nearly everywhere single-family homes are permitted.

The change stemmed in large part from the frustration of building contractors who, because of local prohibitions, couldn’t construct the type of housing — such as garage apartments or backyard bungalows — their clients desired.

To help homeowners understand the new law, AARP New Hampshire, The Gibson Center for Senior Services and the Mount Washington Valley Housing Coalition collaborated on an education and outreach campaign that included videos, radio spots, in-person presentations and handouts (similar to the one pictured).

California (see below) and Oregon also have statewide laws favoring ADUs. Elsewhere, county, city or town laws determine whether and in what way ADUs are permitted. (Turn the page to see two examples of ADUs in use.)

Incentivize Needed Housing

There’s a severe housing shortage in Los Angeles, California, and an even worse shortage of housing that’s affordable. In 2014, Mayor Eric Garcetti set a goal for the city to add 100,000 new housing units by 2021. By July 2017, permits for about 58,000 had been approved.

Although apartment buildings account for most of the new units, a city with a half-million single-family homes has a lot room for ADUs, which became legal statewide on January 1, 2017. To incentivize the creation of affordable ADUs for the rental market, a pilot program in Los Angeles County helps homeowners build ADUs if they’ll rent to people experiencing homelessness.

“Many, many of them are just regular people like you and me who lost their job or lost their house and really don’t have other choices,” County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl said in the Los Angeles Times. About ADUs, Garcetti told the paper, they’re a “way for homeowners to play a big part in expanding our city’s housing stock, and make some extra money while they’re at it.”

The ABCs of ADUs

A guide to New Hampshire’s Accessory Dwelling Unit Law

What’s an ADU?

- A converted, separate bedroom and bathroom added to the same grounds from the primary dwelling and the ADU remain unlocked
- A full independent living unit with its own entrance, water supply, sewage disposal and storage for shopping, cooking, eating and bathing
- A studio — such as a garage loft, basement apartment, backyard cottage, “granny flat” or an extra unit — that is attached or detached from the primary home
- A home that can never be sold independently

A Municipality Must Not:

- Limit an ADU to 1 bedroom
- Require a site of less than 750 square feet
- Require a family relationship between the occupants of the primary dwelling and the ADU
- Require that the interior door between the primary unit and the ADU remain unlocked
- Require additional lot area or other dimensional standards for an attached ADU

Accessory Dwelling Units:

- Increase a community’s housing supply without additional land development
- Make efficient use of existing housing and infrastructure
- Create affordable housing options for many low- and moderate-income residents
- Enable homeowners to earn rental income
- Allow older adults and people with disabilities to live near family or caregivers
- Provide affordable housing options for young adults, empty nesters and people who live alone

Municipalities Must:

- Allow an attached ADU in all residential districts that permit single-family dwellings
- Permit at least one ADU in all single-family dwellings in any single-family zoning districts that permit another ADU
- Require that ADUs conform to the local building and zoning standards that are applied to single-family homes
- Permit any family relationship between the occupants of the primary dwelling and the ADU
- Permit the ADU to be a studio as well as a one- or two-bedroom unit
Sterling and Carrie Whitley live in Santa Cruz, California, one of the least affordable cities in the United States.

When the couple bought their house in 1971, they paid less than $15,000. Nearly 50 years later, similar homes on their street have sold for more than $1 million. The Whitleys, who are in their 80s, own their house outright and don’t want to move, but the financial and physical demands involved in maintaining the house grow more difficult every year.

To help low-income homeowners age 62 or older live independently and keep their homes, the Monterey Bay affiliate of Habitat for Humanity and the city of Santa Cruz launched My House My Home: A Partnership for Aging-in-Place.

The pilot program builds accessory dwelling units (or ADUs, see page 15 to learn more) so older homeowners can downsize into a new, aging-friendlier home and earn rental income from their original house. Or, such homeowners can remain in their house and rent out the new, smaller residence. Participating homeowners are required to charge an affordable rental rate.

Senior Network Services, a program partner, provides ongoing support to older homeowners after the construction is completed.

When the Whitleys’ project broke ground in April 2017, they were the first homeowners to receive an ADU through the My House My Home program.

“The seniors in our community are the bedrock here,” says David Foster, executive director of Habitat for Humanity Monterey Bay. “As this community is changing so much, it’s really important that we find a way seniors can stay here and be participants in the community.”

Another important goal and achievement of the program, notes Foster, is that it brings existing homes into the rental housing market at prices renters can afford.

Allow Attached Accessory Dwelling Units

Letting property owners add an apartment within or onto their house enables them to remain in their home and provide one for someone else.

Evelyn Brom’s plan was to build a backyard cottage and rent it out. She would keep living in her two-bedroom Seattle, Washington, house.

However, a city ordinance prohibited backyard cottages, known as detached accessory dwelling units, or DADUs, on lots with a street at the front and rear of the property, like hers. So Brom lobbied to have the regulation changed.

She wrote letters, invited city planners to tour her lot and spoke before the City Council. The through-lots restriction was relaxed.

After getting the go-ahead, Brom hired architect Chrystine Kim to design the wood-and-glass, two-story structure pictured above (and on page 11). Brom quickly realized she wanted to live in the small, stunning 800-square-foot house. It was a good decision.

A week before the house was finished, Brom, who is in her mid-60s, was laid off from her well-paying job at a national nonprofit. The $3,000 a month she receives in rent for the main house (which is occupied by a couple, their small children and a grandmother in her 70s) provides a needed income.

“Being laid off has made this arrangement a lifesaver,” she says. “And I was able to create the space I was looking to grow old in.” Brom has lived in the pale-green cottage since 2015. “I love it. It’s modern, there’s tons of light, and it’s affordable,” she says.

The home cost around $250,000 to build.

There’s a powder room, open-space kitchen and living room on the first floor, with a bedroom and bathroom upstairs.

To save money, Brom did her own landscaping and some painting. Energy-efficient “smart framing,” extra insulation and hydronic floor heating keep her gas and electric bills low.

Brom knows that if the stairs in the cottage ever become too hard to navigate, she can move back into her original one-story house and rent out the cottage instead. The main house has a basement suite that the tenants now use. If Brom does move back into the house someday, and if she needs in-house help, that suite could serve as living space for a caregiver.

“Now I have options,” she says.

Allow Detached Accessory Dwelling Units

Letting homeowners build a smaller house on their property enables them to remain in their home and provide one for someone else.

A gathering like this makes good neighbors.” said Sterling Whitley that day. “I’m not an outsider. “This makes me feel I fit in with the community,”
Build Tiny Houses …

They’re small but can be mighty in solving big problems

Just west of downtown Tallahassee, Florida, tucked among scores of towering southern pines, is The Dwellings, the country’s first planned tiny-home community with a mission in support of affordability and second chances. A project of the Tallahassee-serving nonprofit Connecting Everyone with Second Chances, The Dwellings describes itself as a “sustainable housing solution for individuals who are financially, socially, or institutionally disadvantaged.”

The community is a home for, predominantly, people who are transitioning out of a shelter but can’t afford market rental rates or meet the income and background check requirements for most housing options.

When fully built, the 30-acre development will be 100 percent green and self-sustaining, with its own solar farm. The property can accommodate up to 130 homes in various sizes of small. (See the caption above.) Rents for the fully furnished, air-conditioned units run from $550 to $850 a month and include utilities as well as high-speed Internet and smart tech features (ranging from the thermostat to HDTV). Each house costs roughly $50,000 to build.

Available amenities include a community center, laundry facilities, a shared garden (with hydroponic greenhouse), and a kitchen and dining hall where for $50 a month residents can eat on a meal plan. An on-site case manager helps with job training and other services.

Potential residents are vetted. If accepted, they must adhere to rules prohibiting pets (except service animals), nonmedical drugs, violence and intoxication. As of the spring of 2018, 25 percent of residents were veterans, and most residents were 55 or older.

The recognition of tiny homes as a way to house people who are homeless is growing. (See the next page for another example.) But tiny homes and tiny-home communities can help solve other challenges as well.

“Nontraditional housing projects and developments, such as The Dwellings, may be able to diminish gaps identified in affordability, home ‘right sizing’ and services for seniors,” says Susan Poplin, an urban planner and officer with the Florida chapter of the American Planning Association.

Residents began moving into The Dwellings in late 2017. One of the first was a 70-year-old former state employee who uses a wheelchair. (Some of the units are handicap accessible.) Speaking about his new home, he told the Tallahassee Democrat, “It felt like something I could hug and say: ‘You’re mine.’”

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Potential residents are vetted. If accepted, they must adhere to rules prohibiting pets (except service animals), nonmedical drugs, violence and intoxication. As of the spring of 2018, 25 percent of residents were veterans, and most residents were 55 or older.

The recognition of tiny homes as a way to house people who are homeless is growing. (See the next page for another example.) But tiny homes and tiny-home communities can help solve other challenges as well.

“Nontraditional housing projects and developments, such as The Dwellings, may be able to diminish gaps identified in affordability, home ‘right sizing’ and services for seniors,” says Susan Poplin, an urban planner and officer with the Florida chapter of the American Planning Association.

Residents began moving into The Dwellings in late 2017. One of the first was a 70-year-old former state employee who uses a wheelchair. (Some of the units are handicap accessible.) Speaking about his new home, he told the Tallahassee Democrat, “It felt like something I could hug and say: ‘You’re mine.’”

... and Grow Tiny Home Communities

Being part of a neighborhood can make a little house feel larger

There are so many people in our community that are called ‘working poor,’” says Dan Bryant, the executive director of SquareOne Villages, a nonprofit seeking to reduce homelessness in Eugene, Oregon. “The second half of that term is really unfortunate. It implies somehow that they’re less than the rest of society. What we see are hardworking people who are just poorly paid.”

SquareOne Villages creates “self-managed communities of cost-effective tiny homes for people in need of housing.” Many of those people work or have a source of income, but affordable housing in this college town of 200,000 is beyond reach.

SquareOne’s first endeavor, Opportunity Village, opened in 2013 and is a very rustic “transitional” gated community with shared cooking, laundry and restroom facilities where, for $35 a month and some volunteer hours, “houseless people” receive their own cabin (albeit without heat, electricity or plumbing) in a secure and stable place.

SquareOne’s second project, Emerald Village Eugene, is a permanent community on 1.1 acres in a walkable, transit-accessible neighborhood. The village can house up to 33 people in 22 tiny homes, each of which contains a kitchenette, bathroom and living/sleeping area. The homes are very tiny (160 to 300 square feet). But at $250 to $350 a month, including utilities, the rent is low enough for people living solely on Social Security or disability. Roughly 60 percent of Emerald Village’s residents are 55 or over.

Although they are renters, as members of a housing cooperative the residents will after a few years gain an equity share in the village. That means they’ll have a small asset (about $1,300) when or if they move out.

The front of the sign says, “Gib’s Digs,” and it was a happy housewarming for Gib and his dog, Sadie. Architect Dan Hill (to Gib’s left) of Arbor South Architecture joined the celebration.
Create Shared Spaces with Private Places

Private homes and apartments with common spaces can be supportive, affordable and great for people of all ages.

E ven in close-knit neighborhoods, single people, couples and families sometimes disappear behind closed doors and don’t interact. Not so in cohousing. This kind of intentional community is created so people can live in their own homes while sharing common areas, indoors and out.

By the spring of 2018, there were 168 cohousing communities across the nation, according to the Cohousing Association of the United States (Coho/US), plus more than 140 others in the planning stages.

Nearly all cohousing communities incorporate a common house, generally featuring a large dining room and kitchen, laundry facilities, and recreational and green spaces. Many communities have a fitness room and/or a workshop and — since the individual apartments or homes can be small — hotel-like guest rooms that can be reserved by residents for their visitors. Parking areas are usually clustered away from the living quarters; Jamaica Plain Cohousing in Boston subsidizes subway passes to discourage the use of personal vehicles.

Although the concept of cohousing dates back to 1960s Denmark, it’s a millennial-friendly lifestyle: Why purchase a lawn mower, a grill, and a washer-dryer when a common house has all of those tools and appliances? Cohousing is just as friendly to both ends of the age spectrum, says Karin Hoskin, a resident of Wild Sage Cohousing in Boulder, Colorado, and executive director of Coho/US. Children find friends, babysitters and a village-to-raise-a-child culture. Being part of a community supports living independently at an older age. Buildings are designed to accommodate all abilities; and there’s always someone to ask for help with an errand or need.

Legally, nearly all cohousing communities are established as homeowners associations with a board of directors. A difference is that all residents are expected to be involved, from performing maintenance to party planning. Decisions are generally made by consensus. Those allergic to debate or who overcommit might find that cohousing is not for them.

Zoning codes regulating whether cohousing is allowed vary by jurisdiction. (People sometimes hear “cohousing” and think “commune.”) Cohousing creators can work with a consultant who knows how to avoid bureaucratic hassles.

“All of us are getting a lot of practice in being patient, assuming best intentions, not taking things personally and giving people the space to be themselves,” said one resident. Located in a walkable, transit-accessible neighborhood that has both a library and a bookstore, the building features a sky deck, workshop, guest rooms and covered parking.

Create Shared Spaces with Private Places

Private homes and apartments with common spaces can be supportive, affordable and great for people of all ages.

Because of Minnesota’s extreme winters, a tunnel connects Monterey Cohousing’s Main House with the newer town houses (shown).

Monterey Cohousing
St. Louis Park, Minnesota: A community of 15 multigenerational households located on two acres in a Minneapolis suburb, Monterey Cohousing is unusual in several respects.

PDX Commons
Portland, Oregon: Residents of this community, opened in August 2017, range in age from their mid-50s to late 70s. Because most of them spent months or years planning the building’s development, knowing one another was a given. But some were surprised by the stress of downsizing and the duties of communal life.
Be Intentional, Live ‘Intergenerationally’
At a time when the definition of family is expanding, ‘intentional communities’ build supportive, caring relationships

More than a third of people age 50 and over are single. Many are childless and live alone.

Parents, especially single parents of young and teenage children, are often overwhelmed and need help. Kids coming out of the foster care system need support and stability.

The “intentional communities” housing model, developed on the basis of residents’ shared interests or values, is an attempt to turn problems like those into solutions.

Bridge Meadows, for instance, is a nonprofit that creates “intentional intergenerational-living communities that bring youth who have experienced foster care, their forever families, and elders together.” Its goal is to “build place permanence and purpose” for all involved.

The organization’s first location, in the Portland, Oregon’s Portsmouth neighborhood, has been in operation since 2011.

The second development, in Beaverton, Oregon, opened in 2017 with nine family town houses and 41 apartments for people age 55 or over. Those apartments are divided between two buildings on either side of the town houses to encourage older residents to interact with other age groups. Every home looks out onto a central courtyard. There are ample indoor gathering spaces, and residents get together for a weekly group meal dubbed the “Happiness Hour.”

Bridge Meadows also has a full-time, on-site social worker.

Beaverton Mayor Denny Doyle is a champion of Bridge Meadows.

“Bringing more affordable housing, particularly for seniors, is a top priority for the city,” he says. “This model of serving families in the process of adopting foster children in an intergenerational complex is all the better.”

At a stage of life when loneliness and social isolation are pervasive, the development’s older residents find both a ready-made community and affordable housing.

Beaverton resident Therese Madden Rose, who is in her 60s, was immediately sold. She moved from Virginia to Oregon to live at Bridge Meadows the day it opened.

The former special education teacher and marriage and family therapist says of the development, and particularly of two toddlers she often spends time with, “I love being there for them; I love being with the families; I love the feeling of being needed; and I love knowing that I have neighbors nearby all the time.”

More Places with a Purpose

Other intentional intergenerational communities include:

Hope Meadows
Rantoul, Illinois
The inspiration for Bridge Meadows, Hope Meadows is a small, five-block neighborhood in a small town. It was established in the mid-1990s for, the development explains, “three groups often at risk of being marginalized in American society — kids caught in the child welfare system, families that adopt children with special behavioral and emotional needs, and retirees who are seeking continued purpose in their daily lives.”

Bastion
New Orleans, Louisiana
A 5.5-acre intentional community for veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, Bastion describes itself as a place where “returning warriors and families” can develop “meaningful relationships that endure for a lifetime” and “sustain a thriving recovery from the wounds and casualties of war.”

Beaverton Mayor Denny Doyle (center) and Bridge Meadows Executive Director Derenda Schubert (second from right) are joined by colleagues on the development’s opening day. Says Schubert, “Community is the healing agent.”
Rethink Student Housing
Some talented college students are living the life of retirees

A n award-winning pianist pursuing a master’s degree at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Or Re’em sometimes misses what he calls the “tribal” nature of his native country, Israel, where large family gatherings were a regular part of his life. So when the institute’s admissions office told students about a program allowing them to live at a nearby retirement home, he sensed it could be a good fit.

As an artist-in-residence of Judson Manor, a senior living complex in Cleveland, Ohio, Re’em has his own apartment alongside 300 building-mates who range in age from their early 60s to more than 100. He receives free room and board in exchange for musical performances, helping with errands and socializing with his elderly neighbors.

“For me, it’s very natural,” he says. “I was very close with my grandparents before they passed away, and I used to go along with my mother, a geriatric nurse, to see patients.”

Started in 2010 by a Judson board member as a way to address the housing shortage at the institute and enhance the lives of Judson’s students, the arts-in-residence program has been a huge success — with at least four times the number of applications as open spots. Judson Manor resident Laura Berick with her young friends and then-housemates, pianist Daniel Parvin and violinist Tiffany Tieu.

Executive director, James Robinson, “but it was something we felt passionate about.” The student selected by Judson Manor Senior Living in Des Moines, Iowa, launched a program in 2015 with nearby Drake University.

“We’re not pioneers,” says Deerdelfield’s executive director, James Robinson, “but it was a way to address the housing shortage at the institute and enhance the lives of Judson’s residents, the artist-in-residence program has been a huge success — with at least four times the number of applications as open spots.”

When not at the music institute, Re’em walks the dog of a Judson Manor neighbor, practices his music in the elegant rooms of the former luxury hotel, dines with his older friends and performs as often as he can for the building’s appreciative audiences.

The pianist’s only complaint is that he can’t perform for his neighbors more often. But he understands: “The residents have regular concerts with great artists here,” he says. “And they are very busy.”

Following in the footsteps of Judson Manor and a handful of other intergenerational housing initiatives in the U.S. and abroad, Deerfield Senior Living launched a program in 2015 with nearby Drake University.

“Deerfield is very special,” says Deerdelfield’s executive director, James Robinson, “but it was something we felt passionate about.”

The student selected by Judson Manor receives a free apartment and meals — along with an indoor parking space, a big plus during Iowa winters — in exchange for two recitals a month.

Artist-in-residence Gabby Clutter, a vocal performance major, says she has gained confidence from performing for Deerfield’s residents. Alise Fitzgerald, one of those residents, is a friend of Clutter’s and especially enjoys the young company and serving as a sounding board.

When Clutter brought her boyfriend to meet her housemates, “we approved,” says Fitzgerald, “but we probably would have told her if we didn’t.” The septuagenarian describes as “magical” the New Year’s Eve gathering she attended alongside the couple.

“She just brings that ray of sunshine!” Fitzgerald says about her younger friend. She’s similarly enthusiastic about the artist-in-residence program. Says Fitzgerald: “It’s great to see younger people change their perceptions of older people — that we don’t just sit around in wheelchairs but have very busy lives.”

Noelle Marcus and Rachel Goor, urban planning graduates of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology turned business partners, wanted to put their skills to use in addressing two housing crises: the paucity of affordable housing and the financial difficulties faced by older people who don’t want to give up their homes.

The result: Nesterly, a website that connects older people who have rooms to spare with young and lower income people seeking medium-term affordable housing.

Launched in 2016, in partnership with the city of Boston, Massachusetts, the service stems from the chaos of Hurricane Sandy, which hit the Northeast hard in October 2012. At the time, Marcus noticed that Airbnb was asking its hosts to house people whose homes were in danger from the storm.

“We’re like Airbnb but designed for home-sharing, not home-renting. It’s a win-win for everyone,” Marcus explains. “We think of Nesterly as helping societal stability. It’s clear that a lot of people can benefit from additional income and social connection, and young people can help out in exchange for lower rent.”

“There’s so much loneliness in America these days. It’s a really debilitating thing for many people,” says Jeffrey, a retired professor and Nesterly host who has lived in his home for 50 years. “Just in terms of your own spirit, it’s a good thing to have other people, and particularly younger people, around.”

Nesterly charges a nominal fee and vets potential renters. Renters and hosts work out prices and details. Since the website’s debut the network has grown exponentially, with thousands of users joining the site. Marcus says the company has received more than 5,000 inquiries from other cities and officials wanting to set up Nesterly in their communities.

That’s part of the plan. Says Marcus: “We work with cities to make intergenerational home-sharing accessible and safe, and take care of the generation before us.”

Ryan, a graduate student and Nesterly renter, resides with Sarah, who has lived in her Boston home for three decades. “My friends are very jealous,” she says about having a helpful housemate.
Lend and Borrow Tools
Most communities have a library filled with books. What if more places had a library filled with power drills, saws and socket wrench sets?

When a group of neighbors got together to start a beautification project in the Lents neighborhood in southeast Portland, Oregon, they needed shovels, rakes, leaf blowers and hedge trimmers, and the list went on. No problem, they thought. They’d borrow tools from one of the tool libraries scattered throughout the city. (Yes, Portland has lending libraries for tools.)

Problem was, their neighborhood fell outside the boundaries of those libraries. So the handy ladies and gentlemen of Lents created one.

The Green Lents Community Tool Library is part of Green Lents, a nonprofit whose mission is to “engage our community to develop a more livable, thriving place.”

Residents in and around Lents can check out a tool in the same way they would a library book. (A state-issued ID and a piece of official mail, like a utility bill, for address verification are needed to become a member.)

The initial tool inventory was donated by a volunteer whose father had died, leaving behind his collection. The library’s holdings continue to grow from downsizing empty nesters.

Outdoors, painting and caulking, books (mostly DIY), plumbing, and electrical. The offerings range from the everyday (such as ladders and lawn mowers, the most commonly requested items) to the not-so-everyday (such as the book Peacock Manure & Marigolds and an egg incubator, which is the least requested offering).

Being able to borrow rather than buy a tool is useful for the odd jobs that crop up only occasionally (chopping firewood, cutting a rusted padlock, tiling a kitchen backsplash). For the do-it-yourselfers who prefer to build their own countertops or refresh their floors, the tools are a windfall. In addition to saving money on tools, users save storage space — lots of storage space. Tool libraries are very helpful to those downsizing empty nesters.

Since its creation in 2012, the Green Lents Community Tool Library has taken on a welcome role far beyond its initial purpose. “Just having a sort of headquarters centrally located in our relatively large neighborhood did a lot in the way of community building,” says Spencer Ward, Green Lents community program coordinator and library manager. “People come together to share advice, experience and exchange ideas. When people get out and about, it also creates a sense of safety. Knowing your neighbors is still one of the best ways that can be done.”

Among the items that can be borrowed from the Green Lents Community Tool Library: a chain saw, pressure washer, wheelbarrow, sledgehammer, toilet auger, air compressor and, for the real do-it-yourselfer, the book Step-by-Step Basic Wiring. Like a traditional library, the tool library also hosts educational workshops and community events.

Encourage Neighbors to Help Neighbors
People of all ages benefit from living in an intergenerational, interconnected, generous community.

Even if it only takes one person to change a light bulb, that task can be daunting if the bulb hangs from the 11-foot-high ceiling of your front porch and you’re in your 80s. Residents of the North Campus neighborhood in Albuquerque, New Mexico, who need a helping hand can get one from any of the neighbors who volunteer for the North Campus Community Project, a nonprofit organization and demonstration project that’s part of the city’s age-friendly work.

As explained in its mission statement, the project supports “a sustainable and thriving community by enhancing our neighbors’ autonomy, health, safety and well-being. As a community, we foster a sense of belonging through intergenerational interconnectivity and mutual generosity.”

Although the neighbor-helping-neighbor program, founded in 2011 by North Campus resident Patricia Comer and her late husband, Robert, assists people of all ages, most of its efforts go toward helping older adults.

When one neighbor couldn’t handle the daily walk to his mailbox, a neighbor-volunteer built a wheelchair ramp and repositioned the mailbox for his reach. When Comer noticed an uneven driveway, she called a neighbor to assist her in leveling it.

The program has a long list of older adults it helps, and the list grows with referrals from other neighbors. Comer also receives long-distance calls from people asking if their parents in Albuquerque qualify for the service. (If their relatives aren’t in North Campus, the callers are referred to city agencies.)

The volunteers truly are multigenerational, ranging from age 3 (a little girl accompanying her mom) to 80-something. “I admire the senior volunteers and their ability to stay physically active, keep their minds active, and how volunteering gives them a sense of purpose,” says Comer, who is in her 60s. “I want to be like them when I grow up!”

In Houston, Texas, Chore Corps volunteers take care of the household tasks their neighbors are no longer able to do, such as lawn care, laundry, light housekeeping and grocery shopping.

In a neighborhood just north of the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, neighbors volunteering with the North Campus Community Project assist other neighbors with household chores and repairs.

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In Houston, Texas, Chore Corps volunteers take care of the household tasks their neighbors are no longer able to do, such as lawn care, laundry, light housekeeping and grocery shopping. In a neighborhood just north of the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, neighbors volunteering with the North Campus Community Project assist other neighbors with household chores and repairs.
Get Someone Else to Mow the Lawn

Having to cut the grass is one of the top challenges older homeowners face, so a crew of ‘court-involved’ teens is taking on the task.

While preparing teenagers who are in the juvenile justice system for a successful return to society, Carl Matthews had an idea. He created a program, called The Grass is Greener, to provide biweekly lawn mowing services for Washington, D.C., residents who, because of age or disabilities, are no longer up to that task.

“I have a checkered past myself, so I know what it feels like to want forgiveness,” says Matthews, the supervisor of facilities at the New Beginnings Youth Development Center, a secure, highly structured residential rehabilitation facility for (per the preferred terminology) court-involved youth. “I know these kids need the opportunity to be seen in a different light so they can heal.”

A treatment team at New Beginnings vets the young men who could be candidates for the program by considering their behavior, temperament and interest in working with equipment. The participating teenagers are mostly between the ages of 15 and 17 and are nearing the end of their time at the center.

Homeowners in need of lawn care services who can’t afford to hire a company or private services like lawn care.”

Plant Trees and Shrubs and Flowers

Green (and other cheery colors) enliven gray spaces

The Pilsen Community Academy, a Pre-K through eighth-grade school, sits in the heart of Pilsen, a historically Mexican-American neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois. A port of entry for immigrant and working-class people for more than 150 years, Pilsen has experienced decades of disinvestment but is seeing a resurgence of community development and interest. In the fall of 2017, staff from AARP Illinois and the AARP Experience Corps, an intergenerational volunteer-based tutoring program, worked with the academy to replant the entire school garden with flowering bulbs and fall plants and also clean up some of the surrounding streets. “By continuing the upkeep of the garden and surrounding area, the students and staff are setting an example for the community,” says Álvaro R. Obrégón of AARP Illinois.

The power of plants, and planting them, served a similar purpose in Marion Gardens, a public housing complex in Jersey City, New Jersey. There, also in the fall of 2017, dozens of volunteers — including residents, high school students and Mayor Steven Fulop — came out to plant trees, shrubs and flowers. “The planting area was entirely concrete with a white cement wall topped with barbed wire, which made the area feel wholly unwelcoming and seemed to encourage litter and vandalism,” says Brian Platt, the city’s director of innovation. “The tree planting was meant to bring in more green space, allow for more water filtration by increasing the pervious surface, and promote a healthy and clean neighborhood.”

Riverhead VISTA program

In Jersey City, New Jersey, residents, students and volunteers (including from the Americorps VISTA program) planted trees and other greenery in a stark public housing complex as part of a beautification effort called The Tree Lovers Crew.
Include Affordability
Zoning codes are a cause of many housing shortages — and a solution

The lack of housing that’s affordable is both a constant and accelerating crisis nationwide. People seeking to move to a new area often can’t afford to do so. Older adults struggle to remain in communities where they’ve lived for decades; young people can’t afford to stay. Employees frequently don’t earn enough to live near where they work.

The problem isn’t a simple case of supply and demand. The housing market is shaped to a great extent by zoning codes, most of which were enacted in the early to mid-20th century to shield neighborhoods from perceived threats that ranged from legitimate concerns (pollution and noise) to outright discrimination (barring low-income people, especially nonwhites).

Zoning policies that, for instance, mandate large single-family homes with multicar garages and noise) to outright discrimination (barring low-income people, especially nonwhites).

Washington, D.C. ’s John and Jill Ker Conway Residence, which was created for homeless veterans, is architecturally intriguing — and has famous neighbors. The headquarters of National Public Radio is next door and the U.S. Capitol building is directly down the street. The objections of existing residents to affordable-housing options in their neighborhoods sometime center on the aesthetics of such projects. Knowing that, many project leaders are using new undertakings to prove that workforce or lower-income housing needn’t be massive, institutional or gloomy.

When the “Right to Counsel” bill passed in New York City, tenants’ rights advocate Carmen Vega-Rivera (next to the podium, wearing orange) celebrated alongside fellow activists and City Council members (from left) Vanessa Gibson, then-Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and Mark Levine.

Enable Tenants to Fight Evictions
By doing so, New York City expects to save millions a year

When retired museum curator Carmen Vega-Rivera spoke up about the lack of reliable heat, hot water and elevator service in her New York City apartment building, the landlord slapped her with an eviction notice even though she had never missed a rent payment.

Vega-Rivera challenged the eviction in the city’s housing court, which was created in 1973 to handle tenant-landlord disputes more speedily than regular courts. With years of professional experience in the arts, education and fundraising, Vega-Rivera assumed it would be easy to act as her own legal representative. But even with legal assistance available at help centers in the city’s housing court locations, a judge recommended she find an attorney.

Although the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1963 that every American has a right to legal counsel, a later ruling limited that right to criminal cases in which a defendant faces incarceration. Housing disputes are civil cases.

With the help of legal counsel, Vega-Rivera won her eviction case. But the experience inspired her to join Community Action for Safe Apartments, which, as part of the Right to Counsel NYC Coalition, was pressing for free legal services for low-income tenants facing eviction.

In 2017, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and the City Council approved $30 million a year in funding for such legal representation. According to a study for the NYC Bar Association, the program is expected to save the city $320 million annually in reduced shelter costs and medical care for the homeless.

Matthew Desmond, a Princeton sociologist, MacArthur “Genius Grant” winner and author of the Pulitzer Prize–winning best-seller Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City, has reported that 90 percent of tenants appearing in housing courts nationwide have no legal representation, while 90 percent of landlords do.

“What without a home everything else falls apart,” he writes. “Families lose their homes, schools, and neighborhoods — but also their possessions: furniture, clothes, books.” Evictions also result in job loss and all-consuming stress, especially when children are involved. “We can’t fix poverty without fixing housing,” he states.
Build Places to Live with Ways to Get Around

Going from place to place without a car is possible when housing, work and transportation needs are planned and placed together.

S

horhanded as TOD, “transit-oriented development” typically describes a neighborhood where people can live within a half-mile of a transit station. Because TODs typically exist in walkable areas and accommodate varying income levels and housing styles, they’re a beneficial option for young families, empty nesters and people who live alone.

There’s also a case to be made that, as expressed by planners for the city and county of Honolulu, Hawaii (see sidebar), TODs “keep the country country” by direct development away from rural areas and open spaces.

“The benefits of transit-oriented development span across the life span,” says Jana Lynott, a transportation planner and senior strategic policy advisor with the AARP Public Policy Institute. Lynott spoke with a 78-year-old resident named Karlyn who used the train to join the years-long waiting list for train station parking.

According to the 2015 Action Plan, the city and county of Honolulu, Hawaii, in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities (see page 7).

“Honolulu’s ideal climate and unsurpassed quality of life make our island home a destination for the aging population and we are always looking for ways to encourage and promote policies that better serve our seniors,” he wrote.

Being age-friendly is a necessity in Honolulu, which is home to one of the nation’s highest concentrations of people 65 and over and, according to the 2010 census, the highest percentage of people 85 or older. By 2030, more than a quarter of the region’s population will be over the age of 60.

An AARP survey in Honolulu identified affordable and accessible housing as key needs for older residents, and Caldwell acknowledged that directly in the age-friendly action plan the city released in 2015. “Affordable housing built in mixed-use neighborhoods along rail will allow our seniors to age in place and continue to be physically active, mentally involved, and socially connected,” he wrote.

Such housing is possible because of the Honolulu Rail Transit Project, which broke ground in 2011 with the goal of creating a series of diverse, walkable neighborhoods connected by a 20-mile rail corridor. Says Caldwell: “Transit-oriented development is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to design and enhance neighborhoods along the rail line, providing greatly needed affordable housing while restoring a sense of community and togetherness.”

A While Westfield, New Jersey, is a pricey place to live, it’s much cheaper than living in Manhattan. New transit-oriented apartments (including 333 Central, shown) are within Westfield’s walkable, thriving downtown (see the cover photo) and relieve New York City-bound commuters from having to join the years-long waiting list for train station parking.

Yale Station Apartments in the amenity-rich University Hill neighborhood of Denver, Colorado, is a transit-oriented, independent-living residence for older adults.

A Although suburban sprawl surrounds much of Plano, Texas, residents of the historic downtown’s transit-oriented housing (the building below is called Junction 15) benefit from living in a walkable Main Street community with direct light-rail service into downtown Dallas.

For Hawaii’s Pedestrian Safety Month in August 2017, Honolulu Mayor Kirk Caldwell (standing, wearing yellow) joined AARP and City Council Member Joey Manahan (also in yellow).
Provide More Ways to Get Around

How we travel from place to place is changing — rapidly. Although we can’t say the boomer generation is the inspiration for this transformation, the coincidence is convenient and ironic. The vast majority of today’s older adults came of age when the car was king, so much so that in most of the country, the needs of automobiles and drivers determined how towns and cities were developed. Walkability, bike-friendliness, public transit and long-distance rail took a backseat to being able to move cars from point A to point B as quickly as possible. While getting a driver’s license and owning a car were once anticipated rites of passage, many young people today aspire more to acquiring the latest smartphone, from which they can tap an app for a ride. Another trend: People of all ages want to be able to safely walk and bicycle to places in their communities, and consumer demand for walkable neighborhoods keeps rising. The current and coming changes (hello, *self-driving cars*) may wind up being of more benefit to older adults than to their kids and grandkids. Age may no longer be a bump in the road to getting around.

The question isn’t “Why did the chicken cross the road?” It’s “How?” Too many streets are uncrossable for poultry or people. The “Roll, Stroll & Strut Fest” (pictured) occurred in Wheat Ridge, Colorado. The red hen is in a temporary pedestrian lane. See page 40 to learn more about Safe Streets demonstrations.
Enable People to Safely Cross the Street

According to “Dangerous by Design,” a report issued by Smart Growth America with support from AARP and others, 13 people a day were struck and killed in the United States by a car while walking in 2014. The report, released in 2016, also notes that during the decade from 2005 through 2014, Americans were 7.2 times more likely to be killed as a pedestrian than from a natural disaster.

The Pedestrian Danger Index, a comparison of data about people who regularly walk as a means of transportation with data about vehicle-related pedestrian deaths, was 18 per 100,000 roadway deaths by 2050. Complete Streets laws and policies (see page 40) are, for instance, Honolulu, Hawaii, and Evanston, Illinois, are a key to ensuring that roadways serve all users.

“So long as streets are built to prioritize high speeds at the cost of pedestrian safety, this will remain a problem,” the “Dangerous by Design” report asserts. “And as the nation’s population grows older on the whole, and as we become more diverse both racially and economically, the need for these safety improvements will only become more dire in years to come.”

Efforts are and for the past few years have been underway to correct such oversights. The Vision Zero initiative adopted by numerous U.S. cities (San Francisco, California, and San Antonio, Texas, are just two) is intended to eliminate all pedestrian injuries and fatalities caused by vehicle collisions. A companion effort, the Road to Zero, seeks to achieve zero roadway deaths by 2050. Complete Streets laws and policies (see page 40) are, for instance, Honolulu, Hawaii, and Evanston, Illinois, a key to ensuring that roadways serve all users.

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Protect Pedestrians

Remind drivers that local roadways aren’t raceways

The downtown area of Wayne, Maine, appears suddenly while driving along Route 133, a well-traveled state highway with fast-moving traffic. Because of curves in the road and a hill, pedestrians crossing Main Street often aren’t seen by drivers until the last second.

“Avoiding collisions with the large trucks that race through town, barely slowing down as they do,” says Stan Davis, chair of the community’s aging-at-home committee, about the most heavily traveled route in town.

An AARP Community Challenge grant (see page 128) helped the small town — population 1,189 — purchase and install flashing “Reduce Speed” signs that were installed at either end of Wayne’s downtown area.

The town also purchased portable pedestrian-crossing signs. “They’ll help keep everyone safe as they cross the road to the post office, the library, the restaurant, the school, the dam where people swim, and the farmers market,” Davis says.

Next on the to-do list, says advocates: creating more sidewalks.

Apply an Aging Lens

It’s a useful way to see more clearly

When Mayor Christopher Cabaldon enrolled West Sacramento, California, in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities (see page 7) in 2015, he was thinking about the present and future of his city.

“West Sacramento has made it a priority to include age-friendliness as a primary lens through which all of the city’s policy initiatives are reviewed prior to adoption,” he said to the U.S. Conference of Mayors at its winter meeting in 2017.

The statement is significant. By committing West Sacramento to seeing through an age-friendly lens, Cabaldon is saying that the needs, desires and realities of the city’s older residents must be considered in the local government’s decision-making process.

The value of using that lens is evident in what the city calls its Age-Friendly Intersection Makeovers. Before such a makeover, the older adults living in a downtown apartment complex often couldn’t cross Jefferson Avenue to visit the Civic Center and its library, senior center and transit center.

The makeover involved installing new traffic fixtures and pedestrian-controlled crosswalk buttons equipped with speakers and countdown timers. After all, ensuring that slower-paced pedestrians can cross a street before a red light turns green ensures that everyone else can safely cross, too.

In the Fruit Belt neighborhood of Buffalo, New York, placemaking specialists from Team Better Block (see page 104) painted a fruity crosswalk at the corner of Orange and Peach streets to demonstrate how crosswalks create safer streets for pedestrians and can also add identity to a location.

Volunteers with The Crossings, a project of Age-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, use creativity and humor to advocate for pedestrian safety by calling attention to the hazards of crossing streets, such as in their city’s Lawrenceville neighborhood.

Wayne, Maine, town manager Aaron Chrostowsky and aging-at-home coordinator Pam Chenea stand with one of the two newly installed flashing signs alerting motorists that their village is just down the road, so slow down!

Mayor Christopher Cabaldon of West Sacramento, California, demonstrates a pedestrian-controlled crosswalk. (See page 39 for more about those.)
Install a Pedestrian Island
Smart planning put stores within walking distance of homes; poor planning separated the areas by four lanes of traffic.

Carol Goodman lives in a 55-and-over neighborhood that’s just three-tenths of a mile from two shopping centers, both of which are located in a planned, mixed-use development in Edgewater, Maryland.

Although the community was created with walkability in mind (there are sidewalks), the residential neighborhood is separated from the commercial areas by a wide thoroughfare. A walk from the residential to retail areas once involved crossing all four lanes of traffic with cars coming, sometimes dangerously fast, from both directions.

Nearly two decades after the first homes welcomed owners, Goodman, a retired nurse, and Carla DeWitt, a younger neighbor and community board member, launched efforts to make the area more pedestrian-friendly. DeWitt took a special interest in the project because her parents had recently moved to the neighborhood from New York.

“My mother is a city girl. She’s accustomed to walking places. My parents like this neighborhood because it’s within walking distances to shops and medical offices,” DeWitt said.

After a few emails and phone calls in search of the right county office, DeWitt reached Nestor Flores, a civil engineer with the Anne Arundel County Department of Public Works.

Flores conducted a traffic study and found that although the vehicle counts didn’t meet the threshold for a red-yellow-green traffic signal, the results indicated that the roadway was definitely in need of a safer alternative for pedestrians.

Among the proven dangers: The average driving speed along the route was 43 mph even though the posted speed limit is 30 mph. The solution: Install a crosswalk island to encourage speeders to slow down and provide pedestrians with a safe refuge while crossing.

Pedestrians have entered the intersection.

Install a Traffic Light
When bus riders traveling to a senior center couldn’t safely cross the street, they stepped out, spoke up and secured a solution.

Visitors to the South Austin Senior Activity Center in Austin, Texas, where the local AARP chapter meets, often get there by walking or taking a city bus.

The bus stop is located directly across Manchaca Road, but there was a problem. The senior center is near a busy intersection, and since the road has a painted crosswalk, cars are supposed to stop, allowing pedestrians the right of way. They seldom did.

Pedestrian fears about having to dodge fast-moving traffic to cross the four-lane road became so intense that some AARP members stopped attending meetings and overall use of the senior center declined.

In response, AARP chapter members decided to do a safety audit, which involved conducting an on-site walkability assessment of the neighborhood and observing the Manchaca Road crossing.

The audit, which was conducted in October 2011, confirmed that the area was extremely unsafe for anyone needing to cross the street. Vehicles often exceeded the 35 mph speed limit and almost none respected the crosswalk. The results indicated that the roadway was definitely in need of a safer alternative for pedestrians.

Among the proven dangers: The average driving speed along the route was 43 mph even though the posted speed limit is 30 mph. The solution: Install a crosswalk island to encourage speeders to slow down and provide pedestrians with a safe refuge while crossing.

Visit the AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit free at AARP.org/WalkAudit.

Get Working on Safe Walking
When seeking a solution to a road safety hazard, the problem needs to be defined and documented. The AARP Walk Audit Tool Kit and companion Leader Guide can help community members and local leaders do just that. The workbooks can be ordered or downloaded free at AARP.org/WalkAudit.
Until the 20th century, city streets and rural roadways were made for people. People walked in the street. If they rode, it was on a horse or maybe a bicycle or inside a carriage. Once automobiles arrived en masse, motor vehicles of all types essentially drove over the people, horses and buggies.

Speed and efficiency became the point of transportation planning. When congestion slowed traffic, roads were widened, traffic signals and stop signs were removed, crosswalks faded away. In many places, being able to safely cross a street on foot or by bicycle is the exception rather than the rule.

Complete Streets policies — also called Safe Streets policies — are being implemented by city, county and state governments nationwide. A Complete Street is usable by all roadway users, whether they’re driving, riding, walking or bicycling. Since not every street can or should be “complete,” such policies simply call for the needs of all users of all ages to be considered and, when appropriate, to be met.

During a demonstration event in Fort Wayne, Indiana (see page 104), the urban planners of Team Better Block completed an existing street. As seen above, the residential street’s makeover includes a one-way roadway with on-street curb parking (1). A landscaped bed, represented by potted plants (2), serves as a “swale,” or pervious surface for capturing storm water. A floating parking lane (3) located away from the curb becomes a safety buffer for a “limitless lane” (4), which is wider and slower than a traditional bike lane and is created for the shared use of bicyclists, people in wheelchairs, joggers and others. Pedestrians are provided a very visible crosswalk (5) and an existing sidewalk (6) is safely away from the vehicle and bicycling lanes.

And just like that, a street created for cars was transformed into a Complete Street for all users of all ages.
Leave the Car Behind

For most of the past century, cars have been the way to go — often the only way to go. Change is happening, just in time.

The millennial generation is driving less and demanding more transportation choices. The nation’s growing population of older adults needs mobility options that don’t place them behind a steering wheel.

Walkable communities are developing or reawakening, and bicycling is now safer than ever thanks to growing networks of bike lanes and improved cycling technology. (Electric assist, or e-bikes, help riders of all ages overcome hills, wind and long distances.)

In addition to ride-sourcing options such as Uber and Lyft, cities nationwide are introducing or enhancing bus rapid transit (BRT) services that offer much of the speed, efficiency and comfort of light-rail transit but at a lower cost.

In Indianapolis, Indiana, a city synonymous with driving at top speeds, it’s becoming easier for people to leave the car behind on trips to work, shops and entertainment venues. The sleek Julia M. Carson Transit Center, which opened in June 2016, allows more than two dozen bus routes to converge in one place with efficient entrances and exits from downtown.

In April 2018, the city was chosen to participate in Transportation for America’s Smart Cities Collaborative. The partnership, says Mayor Joe Hogsett, “will help advance our efforts to create a more accessible community.”

The work will focus on developing “mobility hubs” that “convene multimodal transit options — bus line, bike-share stations, bike parking, and vehicle sharing — into several centralized locations in dense, walkable environments.”

Some 150 miles north, the Broadway Metro Express BRT serves an 11-mile corridor from Gary, Indiana, to suburban Merrillville. Limited stops, increased frequency, new shelters with improved signage, plus other efforts to add efficiency make the service, which launched in February 2018 through the efforts of Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson and her administration, a sensible and speedy commuting option.

Omaha, Nebraska, is gearing up to get on the road with what the city calls ORBT, which is short for the Omaha Rapid Bus Transit initiative announced, by Mayor Jean Stothert in 2017.

Although car-free living isn’t possible in most of the metro area, the city wants residents to know there are car-free options for getting around. Omaha’s annual Midtown on the Move campaign encourages people in four neighborhoods to leave their cars behind and walk, bike, ride a bus or share a ride once per week.

In 2017, 435 individuals took the pledge for a nine-week period — and eliminated 27,700 miles of driving. Sixty percent of the participants vowed to continue the practice.
Make Rides Less Rare Along Rural Roadways

In many places, being unable to drive means being unable to go anywhere.

When Valerie Lefler was a teenager growing up on a dairy farm in rural Nebraska, one of her regular chores, when she wasn’t milking cows, was to drive the workers’ family members around. “I helped them to get to important appointments, such as parent-teacher conferences at school,” she recalls. “Otherwise, many times, the mom wouldn’t have been able to go, because the dad was working and had the family’s only truck. So I would drive her.”

That youthful experience gave Lefler insight into the difficulties residents of sparsely populated rural areas and small towns face when they don’t have a vehicle or are unable to drive. According to the American Public Transit Association, only 33 percent of residents of small towns and 11 percent of those in rural areas have access to public transit options such as buses or van pools.

As the executive director and founder of Feonix: Mobility Rising, a Lincoln, Nebraska-based nonprofit, Lefler connects rural and small-town residents with the transportation services they need. Feonix operates in remote areas of Missouri, Texas and Nebraska. Lefler got her start through a small-business innovation grant and working at a tech start-up.

With Feonix, one option is that car rides are provided through a network of drivers who receive only a mileage reimbursement.

Most of the drivers, Lefler says, wouldn’t seek work as a taxi or ride-share driver but routinely give their relatives or a fellow parishioner a ride to the doctor. “They’re just local people willing to help their neighbors,” she explains. “Before automobiles were common, my great-grandfather would catch a ride into town with the mailman. People used to know their neighbors and barter things all the time. Not so much anymore.”

Another benefit of having a structured ride-sharing and ride-sourcing service through which people can schedule a trip or seek transit options and training is, says Lefler, “the pride factor.” By contacting a service as opposed to asking an individual, users “don’t feel like they’re being a burden.”

While a rural ride service is often essential for getting people to medical appointments and the grocery store, Lefler wants non-driving rural residents to think beyond such travel tasks. “Many times, if you’re in a community where you haven’t had transportation options for a long time, you just give up on once-routine parts of life,” Lefler observes. “You don’t even think about going to have coffee with your friends on Tuesday or going to the VFW on Friday night anymore, because it’s been years since you’ve been able to do so.”

Create Solutions

Local governments and nonprofits often need to step in with ways for nondriving residents to get where they need to go.

In Delaware, the state government hosts the Senior Citizens Affordable Taxi program, which provides a 50 percent discount on taxi fares for people 65 and over and for those with disabilities.

In El Dorado, Arkansas, the volunteer-placement nonprofit El Dorado Connections runs El Dorado Express, a service that provides free transportation to people 60 and over. Volunteer drivers transport them in town and to distant cities such as Little Rock, Hot Springs and Shreveport, Louisiana. (El Dorado Express will drive people ages 40 to 59 for rates that range from $7 for distances of up to 20 miles and $60 for a 300-mile round trip.)

In Fontana, California, the office of Mayor Acquanetta Warren reports that the city’s “curb to curb” Senior Transportation program provides 50,000 rides a year to people age 55 and over as well as those who are medically disabled. The service takes residents to doctors’ offices, the senior center, hospitals and shopping centers. Weekly excursions take passengers grocery shopping and to Target (Wednesdays) and Walmart (Fridays).

For many older adults, on-call transportation services can be lifesaving. “Without it I wouldn’t be able to go anywhere,” says a Fontana rider named Melba. “And then I would totally give up.”

For $30 a year or $2 per one-way trip, older adults in Fontana, California (with Mayor Acquanetta Warren, far right), can get out and about.
Drive in Circles
Circular intersections that move traffic around a central island help reduce traffic-related deaths and injuries

They’re known by many names: traffic circles, roundabouts, mini roundabouts, modern roundabouts, rotaries. Each has a slightly different function and specifications, but the basic idea is the same: moving traffic counterclockwise around a central island, rather than through an intersection, so drivers are forced to slow down and drive more cautiously.

Traffic circles, as we’ll call them here, benefit drivers and pedestrians of all ages. Because circular roadways eliminate the need to make a left-hand turn — which is challenging for many drivers and a frequent cause of collisions — the risk of head-on and right-angle crashes is eliminated. In addition, the number of potential vehicle-to-vehicle and vehicle-to-pedestrian crashes is greatly reduced.

When neighborhoods in the cities of Shawnee, Oklahoma, and Fort Worth, Texas, were seeking affordable and quickly implementable traffic-calming measures, each chose a circular path.

Shawnee acted in response to years of resident complaints about vehicles speeding and running the four-way stop sign at an intersection in the historic Jefferson Terrace neighborhood. With help from an AARP Community Challenge grant (see page 128), the city was able to replace the ignored stop signs with a mini traffic circle, the first in Shawnee.

The Linwood Park neighborhood in Fort Worth was built in the post–World War II era as military housing, and parts of it have been redeveloped since a 2000 tornado. The city partnered with AARP and the urban planning firm Team Better Block (see page 104) to install a temporary traffic circle, along with stop signs and improved lighting. Within three months of the installation, the city was moving forward with plans to make the well-rounded solution permanent.

The permanent, 11-foot-diameter traffic circle in Shawnee, Oklahoma, cost roughly $10,000 and took about two months to complete. “Observing the first vehicles using the mini circle was certainly a highlight,” says Justin DeBruin, Shawnee’s community development director. “Quickly, but safely, motorists were properly using the mini circle.”

In a matter of just a few hours, an open, laneless intersection in a residential area of Fort Worth, Texas, was transformed with street paint, signage and a semipermanent traffic circle constructed out of rubber. Personal injuries and fatalities plummet as much as 90 percent in roundabouts compared with conventional intersections, reports the Federal Highway Administration. Roundabouts cause drivers to slow down, ideally to less than 20 mph, which reduces the risks to both pedestrians and drivers. Eva Bonilla, president of Fort Worth’s Linwood Neighborhood Association, says that’s exactly what she’s seen. “The traffic circle and new stop signs have decreased speeds, and motorists are more cautious when they interact with them,” says Bonilla. “They’re a great traffic-calming addition to the neighborhood.”
Provide a Place to Wait

Passengers’ travels begin long before stepping onto the bus.

As many a bus rider knows, most bus stops don’t offer any shelter from the elements (sun, wind, rain, heat, cold, snow, hail, the list can go on). Nor do these waiting places typically provide a place to sit.

In Chino Valley, Arizona, more than 20 percent of the small community’s population is 65 or over. Yavapai Regional Transit (YRT) is a nonprofit organization that provides low-cost daily transportation between the Central Arizona communities of Chino Valley, Prescott and Prescott Valley.

In 2017, YRT applied for grant funding from AARP Community Challenge (see page 128), noting that “many of the riders who access the service are seniors, or people with disabilities. It is essential that they have a safe, sheltered location at which to wait for the bus, especially during inclement weather.”

Although YRT had already secured funding through a federal rural transportation grant to purchase several steel bus shelters, additional funds were needed for the last installation, which would occur in an area with a sizable population of nondriving retirees on fixed incomes. Since the location had no sidewalks, a concrete platform and wheelchair-accessible path needed to be created on a gravel shoulder and grassy rise.

The AARP grant funds covered the cost of materials. The labor was essentially free since YRT founder Ron Romley, a retired construction project manager for the Arizona Department of Transportation, led the work and the crew came from Arizona Correctional Industries, a program that teaches inmates job skills in construction, carpentry, printing and horse training.

Before the shelter was even ready, a frequent bus user named Ann asked to be the first rider to try out the structure.

She thanked Romley and the workers for enabling her to be “out of the sun year-round” and, during the summer monsoon season, “out of the wet.”

Solar-powered, wheelchair-accessible shuttles travel at about 25 mph and carry up to 12 passengers.

Close the Gap

Driverless shuttles could solve a mile-long problem

One of the most difficult public transit dilemmas is what transportation planners call the “first mile” or “last mile” problem. The terms are interchangeable and refer to how travelers get to transit centers and then to their ultimate destination after stepping off of a bus or train.

A prime example of the problem can be found in Columbus, Ohio, where 40,000 people are employed in the stores, offices and warehouses of the 1,300-acre Easton commercial district. For those employees, the morning commute can mean walking more than a mile from the bus stop at Easton’s transit station to their place of work. Adding to that burden, Columbus’s bus network — there are no passenger trains — is filled with gaps. A 20-minute trip by car can be a two-hour ordeal by bus.

Backed by nearly $50 million in federal and private-sector funding from having won the U.S. Department of Transportation’s 2016 Smart City Challenge, Columbus and its mayor, Andrew Ginther, are working on solutions for the first- and last-mile problem.

Some of the money is being used to develop a system of driverless shuttle vehicles that will travel back and forth between the transit center and locations along the way.

AARP and AVs

Autonomous vehicles — commonly referred to as “self-driving cars” — have the potential to make roadways safer and enhance the lives of people who cannot drive.

Considering that 8 million people age 65 and over don’t drive, such vehicles could be an effective transportation solution. But AVs also raise many questions:

How will driverless vehicles impact traffic congestion and livability? What are the workforce implications (particularly for people, such as bus operators and commercial truck drivers, who drive for a living)? How will communities adapt land use rules related to parking spots and parking garages? What effect will AVs have on mass-transit systems? As policymakers work to answer those questions, AARP will continue to be a voice for consumers of all ages.

To learn about using the ever-changing technologies and safety features in the vehicles that still need human drivers, visit AARP.org/DriverSafety to find and register for a free Smart DriverTEK workshop.
Challenge Drivers to a Road Race

Two cities did — and won

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 94 percent of vehicle crashes can be tied to a human choice or error.

One way to address the problem is to capitalize on the popularity of contests and the use of self-help mobile phone apps.

In Boston, Massachusetts, where Mayor Martin J. Walsh’s Vision Zero Boston initiative aims to eliminate traffic fatalities by 2030, the city partnered with Cambridge Mobile Telematics and the Arbella Insurance Foundation to launch the Boston’s Safest Driver contest.

To compete for prizes, drivers downloaded a smartphone app that logged their daily travels by tracking five metrics: speed, acceleration, braking, cornering and the extent to which the driver was distracted by his or her phone while on the road.

When the contest ended three months later in January 2017, four winners were named, receiving prizes from $500 to $2,000. Ninety-eight other top scorers received smaller cash prizes. Some 5,000 users in total had downloaded the app and logged 3 million miles of travel. The top 1,000 competitors saw their driving speeds drop by almost 35 percent, and their phone-caused distractedness decrease by 47 percent.

As importantly, after the initial competition ended, residents could still utilize the app to monitor and improve their driving.

Boston’s success inspired Seattle, Washington, which has its own Vision Zero initiative, to hold a similar contest in partnership with PEMCO Insurance.

The 2018 competition attracted more than 4,000 participants and earned Russell Lebert — who achieved a perfect score of 100 from Day 4,000 winners and earned Russell Lebert — who achieved a perfect score of 100 from Day 1 of the contest — the $2,000 grand prize and bragging rights as Seattle’s Safest Driver.

Mayor Walsh takes the wheel of the Distractology simulator and tries to keep his eyes on the road during the Safest Driver contest’s kickoff event. The machine, which is often used in high schools, is sponsored by the Arbella Insurance Foundation and based on research from the Human Performance Lab at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

“A Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh (center) met with the winners of Boston’s Safest Driver Competition. “This was a humbling experience overall,” Deirdre Manning, who had the highest score, said about the contest. “I had to put my ego in the backseat and let all the other cars pass me.”
Support Health and Wellness

In 1953, the average life expectancy in the United States at birth was age 66 for males, 72 for females. According to the Social Security Administration, those baby boys — who turn 65 years old in 2018 — can actually expect to live, on average, until age 84.3. The girls can expect to be around until age 86.6. Why the changed predictions? Medical advances, preventive care, healthier lifestyles. (Remember when everybody smoked?) Here are a few more sensational stats: For 65-year-olds today, roughly 1 out of every 4 will live past the age of 90, and 1 out of 10 will live past 95. But not everyone is living longer. A community’s economic health and its natural and built environment are among the many factors that impact a person’s health status and longevity. In fact, there’s a 20-year difference between the U.S. counties with the lowest and highest life expectancies. How and where we live impact our well-being — at all ages.

Working out and getting fit can be a lot more fun when the entire city is in on the action. (See page 55.)
Establish Fitness Zones

So people can spend time outdoors, exercise and get in the zone — for free

More than 20 parks in Pinellas County, Florida, have Fitness Zones that people can use to get in shape and spend time outdoors. The zones are free (no need to join a gym or buy home equipment), open to anyone during park hours and are easy to use.

Each zone offers an array of outdoor exercise equipment designed to promote coordination, balance and flexibility as well as cardiovascular health. The low-impact, joint-friendly workout stations (elliptical cross trainers, sit-up benches, vertical press machines) are weatherproof and vandal-resistant. Some Fitness Zones have wheelchair-accessible equipment.

Outdoor gyms in public parks have long been popular in many Asian countries and parts of Europe, but the idea was slow to catch on in the United States. Then the Trust for Public Land, a nonprofit organization (which AARP partnered with on a parks guide, downloadable at AARP.org/LivableParks) helps cities and counties pay for the development of the Fitness Zones and secure matching funds from other sources.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 1 in 5 American adults doesn’t get enough exercise and, as a result, is at a higher risk for heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, some cancers and depression.

For most adults, the CDC recommends about two and a half hours of brisk walking spread out over a week, with muscle-building exercises added on two of those days. Fitness Zones are just what the doctor ordered.

The zones are also an exercise in community-building. “That’s what defines them,” says Adrian Benepe of the Trust for Public Land. “You can be outdoors with friends and neighbors.”

Pinellas County and other areas have found Fitness Zones to be an effective weapon against loneliness, isolation and depression. Since the zones and the parks where they’re housed offer something for everyone, they’re a great way for people to meet their neighbors, make friends, and connect with their children, grandchildren and other younger people.

And maybe even train for an upcoming 5K.

Make Health a Public Priority

Because unhealthy people can’t create great places

When a health survey ranked Pinellas County — in which St. Petersburg, Florida, is the largest city — 33rd out of the state’s 67 counties, St. Pete Mayor Rick Kriseman and Deputy Mayor Kanika Tomalin decided it was time to pull the city up by its bootstraps.

“We don’t do middle of the pack,” Tomalin said. “We lead!”

The pair launched Healthy St. Pete, a community engagement and empowerment initiative to improve the health outcomes of the city’s 260,000 residents. The initiative has four main components — Live Healthy, Eat Healthy, Shop Healthy and Play Healthy — and is designed to help people do each of those things by building productive partnerships with civic and non-profit organizations, local businesses and public health authorities.

Healthy St. Pete’s Food Is Medicine program, for example, offers free classes in wellness, nutrition and healthy cooking, targeted mostly to people who live in food deserts, where it’s difficult or impossible to find affordable, good-quality fresh food. At the end of each class, participants receive a $10 voucher for use at the program’s on-site fresh-produce stand.

For people who can’t get to the city’s Saturday Morning Market, orders can be made online for pickup at one of several locations. A “mobile pantry” distributes nutritious foods to anyone who needs it, no prescreening or ID required.

Healthy St. Pete also pushed to make the city a friendlier place for bicyclists and pedestrians. There’s been a dramatic surge in bicycle-friendly businesses, and the City Trails program makes it a lot easier to get around via three miles of nature trails and boardwalks through the 245-acre Boyd Hill Nature Preserve, a wilderness oasis on the shores of Lake Maggiore.

Also on the menu: free yoga classes, open-to-all swing dances, an annual 5K and one-mile fun walk, a host of health and wellness presentations, a bus that brings free health screenings to neighborhoods throughout the city, a citywide community fitness challenge, and programs about preventing chronic diseases.

The reason for making fitness a municipal mission is, as Kriseman sees it, very simple. “If we’re not a healthy city, if we’re not an active city,” he says, “we can’t truly be a great city.”

At the FitLot park in New Orleans, Louisiana, coaches provided 36 hours of free training to says an organizer, “an extremely dedicated group of seniors in a community that suffers from one of the largest health disparity gaps in the country.”

An AARP Community Challenge grant made it possible for Cutter Bay, Florida, to install four pieces of “universally accessible” fitness equipment under a shade canopy in Cutter Ridge Park.

The 12-week, 2017 Healthy St. Pete Fitness Challenge ended with a Fit City Celebration (and exercising) in North Straub Park. Among the five fitness categories participants could select: “Age-Defying Fitness” for people 60 and over.
Blaze a Trail for Health and Fun
But make sure there are bathrooms nearby and some places to sit

The simple act of walking or riding a bike reduces the chance of dementia, depression, diabetes, osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease, anxiety, high blood pressure and colon cancer by at least 40 percent, states an American College of Sports Medicine fact sheet.

There’s also growing evidence that spending time in nature boosts the health of people over the age of 65. “Everyday contact with nature … can improve quality of life for aging populations,” reports the health care journal Health & Place.

The news gets even better. Those activities can be combined by using parks and recreational trails, the latter of which are becoming more common in towns and cities coast to coast. A number of communities are working to make local bicycling and walking trails more accessible and enjoyable for people of all ages.

In Natick, Massachusetts — a town of 34,000 outside Boston — the municipality, the local planning agency and AARP Massachusetts teamed up to launch the Age Friendly Trails project to address the needs of older residents using off-road community trails. More than 60 people shared their experiences through an online survey and in focus groups.

Many of the suggestions were incorporated into a prototype of an age-friendly trail (seen at left), in which proposed improvements were depicted in photographs placed along a path created behind the Natick Community Senior Center.

Key issues emerging from the research identified the need for, in no particular order, places to sit, bathrooms, easy-to-follow signage, level surfaces and more widely available information about the trails.

The Next Steps List coming out of the project included reconstructing the local Middlesex Path as a demonstration model for age-friendly trails, establishing regular trail walks for older adults, upgrading trail maps to better highlight amenities and creating an age-friendly urban trail through Natick’s cultural district.

In and around Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, older residents are encouraged to join guided tours of two of the region’s largest green spaces — the 644-acre Frick Park and the 2,000-acre South Park. The walks are led by volunteer park ambassadors as part of Senior Connections, a program of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation. The goal is to get more of Allegheny County’s older residents exercising and spending time outdoors year-round.

To help people imagine walking the trails in Natick, Massachusetts, the town’s planning agency created a mock trail (just step through the gilded frame to enter) and asked “hikers” to select the trail features they’d like to see installed in real life.

The Jewish Healthcare Foundation worked with the Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy, the nonprofit Venture Outdoors and AARP Pennsylvania to involve older residents in park walks and activities.

In and around Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, older residents are encouraged to join guided tours of two of the region’s largest green spaces — the 644-acre Frick Park and the 2,000-acre South Park. The walks are led by volunteer park ambassadors as part of Senior Connections, a program of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation. The goal is to get more of Allegheny County’s older residents exercising and spending time outdoors year-round.

Newport, Vermont, in partnership with businesses and nonprofits, is creating a roughly 6-mile, four-season waterfront trail from its downtown to the Canadian border through Bluffsides Farm, which was acquired by the VT Land Trust and opened for public use.
B being 60 or older had changed a lot since 1983, the year Lexington, Kentucky, opened its first senior citizen center. “Lexington’s seniors are going to love this place,” Mayor Jim Gray said at the 2016 opening of the new, $13 million Lexington Senior Center. “It’s 33,000 square feet devoted to their interests, their needs and their priorities.”

That means in addition to the classic offerings—billiards, cards, bingo—the center has fitness stations, athletic fields and green spaces. 22-acre Idlehour Park provides easy access to a paved walking trail, pickleball courts, adult fitness activities were the most popular. More than 3,500 new members had joined, and the average daily attendance was 327. Membership is free and available to residents age 60 or over (All members are required to be “independent,” which is defined as being “physically able to participate in programs and activities without supervision or assistance” and properly “oriented to time and place.”)

During the new center’s first year of operation, the center for older residents is so successful that it drives economic development and is an important part of the city’s identity. "It’s awesome that the city recognized the growing need of the aging population and dedicated resources to create this state-of-the-art center to serve people in their 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s," Kristy Stambaugh, the city’s director of aging and disability services, told a local reporter. "This is a place for lively, energetic older adults.”

In addition to fitness, the center offers art and crafting classes, hosts history seminars taught by college professors, and sponsors day trips as well as international tours. For serious matters, three full-time social workers are available, as are numerous support groups.

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While the center is a big hit today, it was also created for the future. By 2030, Fayette County is expected to have nearly 100,000 older residents. Fortunately, the new center — its address is 195 Life Lane, by the way — can accommodate up to 900 people at a time. ■

Make Fitness Fun
Out with the old (senior center), in with the awesome and new

Build It and They Will Come
A center for older residents is so successful that it drives economic development and is an important part of the city’s identity.

The acronym OPC stands for the Older Persons’ Commission, which sounds as if it’s, well, a commission. While there is an OPC “governing board” of eight appointed commissioners, when residents of Rochester, Rochester Hills and Oakland Township in Michigan refer to the OPC, they typically mean the 90,000-square-foot community center that’s used daily by hundreds of the area’s residents who are age-50 or over.

The center has a full-size gymnasium, an indoor walking track, a lap pool, a therapy pool for exercise classes (water temperature 92°F), cycling classes, circuit training, yoga, tai chi, Pilates, ballet, Zumba and more. There’s a woodshop, computer lab, pottery studio, auditorium, stage and performance arts group. OPC Leisure Travel offers local, overnight and extended trips in the U.S. and overseas. "It’s a beautiful facility, a safe facility, a great amenity for the community," says Rochester Hills Mayor Bryan Barnett, adding that developers and companies tell him, "It’s the reason we’re here.” Barnett jokes that the OPC’s roster of activities is so full it reminds him of a cruise ship’s activities schedule. “We recognize the value of aging in place,” he says. “It’s one of the most important trends we can invest in.”

Membership is free for age-eligible residents of the OPC’s three home communities. People 50-plus from the surrounding area can join for $175 a year or $225 per married couple.

The OPC’s community services include Meals on Wheels, an adult day care center and a minibus that provides more than 50,000 door-to-door rides per year. That service is so revered by voters that they adopted a special property-tax assessment to pay for the transportation program.

Credit for the Older Persons’ Commission goes to community activist Marye Miller, its founder and retired executive director. As a driver for a transportation program that shuttled passengers between nursing homes and activity centers, Miller saw firsthand how the needs of the area’s older adults were not being met.

In the mid-1980s, through dogged advocacy and fundraising work, Miller was able to purchase and convert a vacant school building into a senior center. The current building opened in 2003. As Barnett explains, “Marye Miller took the OPC from a small program to a community within a community.” ■

Build It and They Will Come
A center for older residents is so successful that it drives economic development and is an important part of the city’s identity.
Grow Food so a Neighbor Can Eat
That’s the point of a community farm that feeds people of all ages in need

In Jamestown, Rhode Island, residents of all ages pour time and energy into a 17-acre Conanicut Island expanse of land called the Jamestown Community Farm. Located just over the bridge from Newport — long a playground for sailing, yachting and the wealthy (especially during the Gilded Age) — the seasonal farm stand is a popular stop for island residents.

While many small farms don’t turn a profit, this one is intentionally a nonprofit, created, explains its website, “in response to an idea that there is both individual and community value in helping those in need and that one of the most fundamental needs is good food. Growing fresh produce and distributing it to those less fortunate meets a fundamental human need and is also a valued project defining our Island community.”

Since its founding in 2000, the donor-supported, volunteer-led and -worked farm has grown more than 160,000 pounds of fresh produce and distributed it at no cost to food pantries and soup kitchens throughout the state, including in Providence, Peace Dale and Warwick, as well as in neighboring Newport and right at home in Jamestown.

More than 100 volunteers show up regularly or occasionally during the growing season. (The farm is a beneficiary of student as well as court-mandated adult community service hours.) Even the official farm manager, Bob Sutton, is a volunteer.

Bob’s wife, Lynda, is a farm volunteer as well. She has developed a large raised-bed herb garden and runs a Saturday morning cooking demonstration using fresh farm vegetables. Lynda also established an arrangement with the Jamestown food market to pick up and recycle freeze in an airtight container. Freezing will slightly tender and still a bit crunchy. Then, make a stir fry … but only cook until veggies are ready to serve.

The farm does not grow corn. “Corn robs the soil of nutrients at a level that’s difficult to replace organically,” explains Bob Sutton, manager of the Jamestown farm. Community Challenge grant (see page 128), the Jamestown Community Farm sent a letter of support and agreed to provide farm-raised ingredients for cooking classes (and a cookbook) promoting locally grown fresh produce.

Chapter 1 of what’s titled, simply, Community Cookbook is called “Using Fall Produce” and includes recipes for zucchini pancakes and pumpkin chickpea stew. Chapter 2, “Cooking for One,” presents a black bean breakfast bowl and a garlic chicken stir-fry, from which we can share the following tip:

“Need to use your veggies before they go bad? Make a stir fry … but only cook until veggies are slightly tender and a bit crunchy. Then, freeze in an airtight container. Freezing will preserve your veggies and when you reheat, on the stove or in the microwave, they’ll soften a little bit more!”

Garden Above Ground
It’s a great solution for the dirt-averse and anyone with aching knees

We’ve been noticing the trend for a while now, but it was confirmed to us during the inaugural year (2017) of the AARP Community Challenge, our “quick action” grant program (see page 128). So many of the applicants were seeking funds for creating raised-bed gardens.

As cleverly stated by the editors of Popular Mechanics, “raised garden beds take the hassle out of horticulture.” By raising the soil level off the ground, such gardening structures “reduce the back-bending effort needed for jobs such as planting, weeding and harvesting.”

Among the raised-bed-seeking applicants AARP did assist were those from the Broad Street Community Garden in Hartford, Connecticut, and the town of Bowdoinham, Maine. In Connecticut, staff and volunteers from a nonprofit called Knox built raised garden beds that children, people with disabilities and older adults can access while sitting or standing. In Maine, the municipal government was able to provide elevated garden beds, complete with soil, to six residents in Bowdoinham, Richmond and Bowdoihm who, because of disabilities, could not maintain ground-level gardens.

The need for the garden beds became apparent during a 2016 community survey, explains Patricia Oh, an AARP consultant and the former adult services coordinator for Bowdoinham.

“We learned that many people give up gardening because they have a physical disability that prevents them from keeping a traditional, on-the-ground garden,” says Oh. “In our community, gardening is more than a hobby. Gardening indicates that a person is productive, self-sufficient and capable of continuing desired pursuits.”

The placemaking firm Team Better Block built raised-bed gardening boxes for the Fruit Belt neighborhood in Buffalo, New York. (Learn more on page 106.)
Two residential buildings for low-income older adults are located near the Trax light-rail line in Salt Lake County, Utah. Once the passengers are on the train, it’s a 10-minute ride to a supermarket.

The problem: Those residents didn’t know how to use Trax. So Joey McNamee and Janet Frick from the county’s office of Aging & Adult Services launched the Transit Together Grocery Project.

Nearly three dozen residents, including seven over age 80, signed up for the three-trip transit training. One “walked every day for two weeks so she would be strong enough to make the trip with the group the first week,” says McNamee.

Local volunteers, including students from the nearby University of Utah, were each buddied with two residents. The ratio allowed “participants to have the support of a volunteer, but also get better acquainted with one of their neighbors,” says Frick.

A participant who uses a wheelchair hadn’t been to a grocery store in three years. She had a volunteer take her picture as proof to her daughter that she had actually gotten out and gone shopping.

After the training, two-thirds of the residents said they would continue to use public transit. One planned to teach a neighbor, another took Trax to a theater with friends. Two young volunteers said they’d continue joining their older buddies on Trax trips to the supermarket.

## Secure Drinkable Water

To make that happen, AARP Michigan took to the streets.

During the fall of 2015, the residents of Flint, Michigan, Mayor Karen Weaver and other local leaders were sounding the alarm about the city’s lead-contaminated tap water. As too many officials in the state and beyond passed the blame and pointed fingers, real people were suffering.

Flint residents showed up at crisis forums with samples of the frighteningly brown and murky water flowing from their taps. Tests revealed that children had abnormally high lead levels. People were afflicted with mysterious rashes and illnesses.

“At a community meeting, one woman opened her mouth and asked me to take a picture of the open sores inside,” recalls Mark Hornbeck of AARP Michigan.

While the initial response was to provide residents with bottled water (for both consumption and bathing), and then water filters for attaching to faucets, those were and remain temporary measures.

To fully solve the problem, the lead-tainted service-line pipes that connect the city’s water main to individual homes need to be removed and replaced. But before that can happen, homeowners must sign a FAST Start consent form granting permission and access for contractors to do the free repair work.

At a time when there was so little trust in government agencies, AARP and its volunteers were trusted messengers with the capacity to distribute and collect consent forms and help the community understand why signing the form was necessary.

By the spring of 2018, AARP Michigan had contacted more than 7,000 Flint homeowners in person or by mail to secure consent forms. The goal is to reach at least 7,000 more.

## Teach Transit Skills

They can be a ticket to active living and healthy eating.

### How to Help a Community in Crisis

**AARP Michigan State Director Paula Cunningham shares what she, her staff and volunteers learned from working on the ground in Flint**

1. **Listen** to the voices of the people who have been impacted by the crisis, and be sure to listen to a diverse audience.
2. **Don’t assume** you know what people need. Many outside of Flint would say, “Bring more water.” However, at a certain point, residents didn’t need or want more water bottles — they wanted a lasting solution.
3. **Document** needs based on the feedback received. It’s important to formally capture and refer to such information. That’s useful for showing and staying focused on needs.
4. **Prioritize** the needs and tell the community what you’ve learned and how you plan to help. It’s rarely possible to do everything needed, but let the community know what, based on its feedback, you can do.
5. **Don’t quit** until the job is completed. The easiest thing for AARP to do for Flint would have been to write a check. But money wasn’t the biggest need. If a longer term commitment can’t be made to stay connected to those who are affected, it might be preferable and kinder not to engage at all.
6. **Communicate, collaborate and coordinate.** It’s important to communicate the plan to as many people and organizations as possible. People coming to a plan with fresh ears and eyes can help prevent mistakes. Collaborate with willing, like-minded, focused partners. Coordinate with volunteers and others to develop and implement a well-thought-out plan.
7. **Cheer progress.** Sometimes the task can seem so daunting that progress can be overlooked. Occasionally take a few moments to celebrate and to say thank you to those who have helped.

**SALT LAKE COUNTY:**

**Teach Transit Skills**

They can be a ticket to active living and healthy eating.
Help Older Residents Feel Safe in Their Homes

Living alone can be frightening, but there are ways to make it less so.

With more and more older Americans living alone (nearly 1 in 3, according to the U.S. Census Bureau), communities face some special challenges as they work to keep their older residents — and individuals with unique problems or needs — safe and healthy. Here are a few success stories:

With funds provided by an AARP Community Challenge grant (see page 128), the town of North Yarmouth, Maine (population 3,600), purchased and installed 25 residential key safes on the entry doors of older residents who live alone or have a history of health issues. Emergency personnel can use the vault-style Knox Home Box to gain access to a residence without the delay and risk of damage caused by a forced entry. North Yarmouth Fire-Rescue has the only key that opens the lockbox and, for an extra measure of security, the system tracks when each box is opened and by whom.

“I think it’s a great benefit for the town,” says Chief Greg Payson, who adds that the program not only helps older residents live in their own homes but gives them — and their loved ones — peace of mind.

In Olathe, Kansas, the city’s police department sponsors Operation Lifeline, which since 1979 has tapped volunteers to make daily telephone calls to older adults who live alone outside their homes but gives them — and their loved ones — peace of mind. Chief Greg Payson, who adds that the program not only helps older residents live in their own homes but gives them — and their loved ones — peace of mind.

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In Olathe, Kansas, the city’s police department sponsors Operation Lifeline, which since 1979 has tapped volunteers to make daily telephone calls to older adults who live alone.

Some of the Olathe, Kansas, volunteers who make daily check-in calls to older residents have been volunteering for the program since the 1980s.

and don’t have anyone in the area to regularly check in on them. Participants in the free program provide the police department with a key to their home. The key is kept in a locked box at the station and is used only if the resident fails to respond to a daily call and doesn’t answer the door when a police officer is dispatched to the home.

“The program truly does save lives,” says Mayor Mike Copeland. “We’ve actually assisted people who have fallen during the night and were discovered when they couldn’t answer the volunteer’s call.” Copeland adds that there have been times when the volunteer caller felt something just wasn’t right with a participant and got in touch with family members who were able to help.

Farther west, in Tucson, Arizona, that city’s fire department launched Tucson Collaborative Community Care, commonly called TC-3, to address the growing number of nonemergency calls coming into 911. (For instance, in 2014, 50 individuals accounted for almost 1,400 calls to the 911 system.) The reasons for the repeated calls were frequently related to noncrisis health matters, such as the caller being confused about a medication schedule or reaching out because of an anxiety attack or unfounded fears.

With TC-3, “We navigate them to the right resources,” says Capt. Brian Thompson about the program established in 2016.

“The help provided by TC-3 is active rather than passive,” Tucson Deputy Chief Sharon McDonough explains in an article she wrote for FireChief.com. “Appointments are scheduled, contacts are made, paperwork is filled out, and transportation is arranged. Some individuals find solutions immediately, coming out of the 911 system as they are connected to long-term disease management, palliative care, hospice, home repairs, housing, pet solutions and dietary care, while others require ongoing assistance and contact to keep them engaged and their needs managed.”

As a result of TC-3’s interventions, nonemergency requests from frequent 911 callers declined dramatically — from 354 to just 26 in one 18-month period.

There are many different types of key lockboxes, and the prices vary. (The technology-loaded Knox-brand box shown here costs about $175 and is the kind the North Yarmouth Fire-Rescue Department lends to older residents in its town.) Securely storing a key outside of the home is a smart safety solution for people of every age.

The yellow dot can also be used at home. Placed beside a front or entry door, it means that potentially lifesaving information about the occupants is located inside the kitchen refrigerator. (A common placement is behind or between items on the door’s shelves.)

More than 20 states have started yellow dot programs, which are typically managed by departments of transportation.

In a growing number of communities, a yellow dot is helping first responders — police, firefighters, EMTs, even local volunteers — provide lifesaving medical attention during that first “golden hour” after an automobile collision or other emergency.

Typically, two yellow stickers are placed on a vehicle — one on the driver’s-side front windshield and the other on the driver’s side back windshield. The yellow dot indicates that there’s an envelope or folder in the glove compartment with vital information about each person who regularly rides in the vehicle.

The packet often includes the name of the person, a photograph, a list of current medications and health issues (such as heart conditions or allergies), and emergency contact information.

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The yellow dot is simply a sticker. Some, like this one from New York State, are customized with local branding, but any yellow sticker will do, so long as the community’s first responders understand what it means.

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More than 20 states have started yellow dot programs, which are typically managed by departments of transportation.
Leveraging the prescription is data

Every year in Baltimore, Maryland, older adults fall and require hospital care at a rate that's higher than the national average. Such falls frequently lead to death or disability and a loss of independence. Nationally, falls are a leading cause of injury and death among older adults.

In 2016, Leana Wen, M.D., the Baltimore health commissioner, launched a citywide initiative to reduce serious falls among residents age 65 and over.

By tracking fall-related emergency room visits and hospitalizations, the Baltimore Falls Reduction Initiative Engaging Neighborhoods and Data (B’FRIEND) program creates a real-time data surveillance system that integrates medical data with health, housing, environmental and social service data related to fall risks.

The data will be used to determine what can be done to prevent falls and fall-caused injuries — especially in neighborhoods with high fall rates.

The goal of the initiative, funded by a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant, is a one-third reduction over three years in falls needing ER or inpatient hospital care. The city also wants to develop a falling-risk score to include in patients’ medical records as an alert to doctors. A fall is a “discrete episode that is clearly preventable,” declares Wen.

“Sharing data across sectors narrows knowledge gaps, increases collaboration and ultimately improves community health,” Wen said at the project’s launch. “In order for our community to see better health outcomes, we need more comprehensive data — including data that sheds light on the social determinants beyond clinical health care that influence our health.”

Get Smart

As part of a volunteer-initiated and -led effort, Winnemucca, Nevada, held a town hall meeting in 2016. The main agenda item: aging issues, especially dementia and driving.

The attendees realized, for instance, that taking car keys away from a person who has serious memory impairment is an insufficient solution if other services and assistance aren’t provided.

The group’s efforts — spelled out in more than 20 “SMART Goals” — are focused on such needs as creating pleasant outdoor spaces, ensuring that people have transportation options, providing support for caregivers, and including older people in social events and community activities.

To document its work and help other communities, project coordinator Gini Cunningham put together a book, Age- & Dementia-Friendly Winnemucca and Humboldt County Project, that “details every step” of creating an age- and dementia-friendly community.

Learn What It’s Like to Live with Memory Loss

People diagnosed with dementia and Alzheimer’s make themselves heard

After being diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease at age 84, Bob Savage fell into a serious depression.

“Almost immediately, people started treating me differently,” he explains. “They spoke slowly. They were hesitant to come visit me. They didn’t know how to interact with me.”

He adds: “The stigma was so powerful, I considered committing suicide.” Two years later, in 2017, Savage, was helping spearhead the Dementia Peer Coalition, a groundbreaking new organization for people with Alzheimer’s disease and other types of dementia. “I found my purpose in life and this is it,” says Savage.

The Dementia Peer Coalition is the first organization in the U.S. to be created by people with dementia. “I found my purpose in life and this is it,” says Savage.

The organization has four priorities: to participate in research; and to help people with better services; to educate the public and provide support; to advocate for respect and connect people with dementia to one another.

My purpose in life and this is it,” says Savage.

Savage also participates in theater monthly and a statewide group that holds virtual meetings. Savage also participates in theater monthly and a statewide group that holds virtual meetings.

The Dementia Peer Coalition is the first organization in the U.S. to be created by people with dementia. Most of his career was spent in the field of drug and alcohol addiction, where he often encouraged people with addiction to talk openly about their efforts at recovery.

“That whole experience of speaking out is really at the root of the Dementia Peer Coalition,” he says. Since moving beyond depression, Savage says. He and Shivers share a common goal to move beyond ‘care’.

In association with LiveWell, he has launched a peer led support group that meets in person monthly and a statewide group that holds virtual meetings. Savage also participates in theater events about dementia and a speaker’s bureau that sends him out into the community.

He and Shivers share a common goal to expand the coalition. “We want to develop a model that can be replicated across the country,” Savage says.

The group’s efforts — spelled out in more than 20 “SMART Goals” — are focused on such needs as creating pleasant outdoor spaces, ensuring that people have transportation options, providing support for caregivers, and including older people in social events and community activities.

To document its work and help other communities, project coordinator Gini Cunningham put together a book, Age- & Dementia-Friendly Winnemucca and Humboldt County Project, that “details every step” of creating an age- and dementia-friendly community.

Learn more about their efforts by searching for the YouTube video “Dementia Peer Coalition: Moving Beyond ‘Care’.”

A woman (right) and a man (left) sitting in a car. The woman is driving and the man is in the passenger seat. There is a car repair icon in the background. The woman is talking and the man is listening.

Bob Savage (third from right) and other people living with Alzheimer’s speak to an audience about coping with memory loss. Each shares, explains Savage, “what it’s like to be ‘me’ these days.”

The Baltimore City Health Department hopes to map where older adults are falling, determine the cause and find solutions.

A man and a woman sitting at a table. The woman is smiling and the man is looking at her. There is a laptop on the table.

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Create Caring Policies
Family leave is needed by working men and women, young and old

More than 40 million Americans are taking care of a loved one age 50 or over. Approximately 6 in 10 of them are doing so while also trying to earn a living. Those statistics, from the AARP Caregiver Resource Center (check it out at AARP.org/Caregiving), don’t include the millions of Americans who are caring for children while also holding down a paid job. Nor do the numbers acknowledge the millions of people who are caring for children and adult family members while also being employed.

In fact, the only national policy acknowledging the multiple roles so many Americans play is the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, which allows eligible workers to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave without losing job security or health benefits. The law can apply if a worker needs to care for a kūpuna (i.e., older) family member like an aging parent,” declared the coalition of advocates (AARP among them) working for paid family leave. When fully implemented in 2021, the New York law will be the most comprehensive paid family leave policy in the nation.

About the Kūpuna Caregivers Program

In Hawaii, the Kūpuna Caregivers Program will provide up to $70 a day to residents who care for a kūpuna (i.e., older) family member and work at least 30 hours a week outside the home. Payments can be used to cover adult day care, household help, transportation, prepared meals, even lost wages. The law went into effect in January 2018 with $600,000 in seed money from the state. (Read more about kūpuna-friendly efforts on pages 33 and 98.)

Speaking of caregiving, AARP has been working with state legislatures and governors nationwide in support of the CARE (Caregiver Advise, Record, Enable) Act, which requires hospitals to:

1. Record the name of the family caregiver when a patient is admitted to a hospital
2. Notify that caregiver when the patient is to be discharged to another facility or home
3. Provide the family caregiver with instructions and a demonstration of all tasks that the caregiver will have to perform — such as medication management, injections, wound care and transfers

The CARE ACT

The statement quoted above is from the Tufts Health Plan Foundation, which has provided nearly $30 million to nonprofits in Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New Hampshire as part of its mission to bring demonstrable improvements to longstanding health care issues and “move communities toward achieving age-friendly policies and practices.”

The foundation’s community investments have included ones to:

- Support the update of Rhode Island’s five-year plan on Alzheimer’s and related disorders
- Help assess and document how to make Belmont, Massachusetts, more age-friendly
- Develop community plans in Manchester, New Hampshire, that include age-friendly policies and practices

And, lest we forget, in April 2018, at an AARP Massachusetts conference, the foundation announced it would be investing $250,000 over five years to accelerate the creation of age-friendly work in the state, where more than 25 towns and cities, along with the state government (see the next page), had already joined the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities (see page 7).

“We hope other funders and philanthropies will join us in supporting efforts that improve the livability of our communities,” says Nora Moreno Cargie, the foundation’s president.

“By addressing the inequities we see, we make it more possible for older adults to live healthier, fulfilling lives.”
Be an Age-Friendly City

Boston has a 75-point plan for improving the lives of its older adults

When Martin J. Walsh was sworn in as Boston’s 54th mayor in 2014, he became the city’s first new mayor in 20 years. Soon after, the new administration held a public hearing about the city’s social services. Members of a local AARP chapter were in the audience and they spoke up to stress the need for their city to be a place where older residents could comfortably age.

The message was heard.

In May of that year, Boston became the first municipality in Massachusetts to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities (see page 7).

“The age-friendly philosophy is closely aligned with my vision for Boston,” said Walsh. “The guiding principle focuses on designing livable communities that promote good health, strong civic participation and clear communication. In other words, an age-friendly city is a thriving and inclusive city for all.”

As part of its research for preparing an action plan, which is a requirement of network members, Walsh’s administration, in partnership with AARP Massachusetts and the University of Massachusetts-Boston, surveyed older adults and conducted community listening sessions with residents.

Funds for the planning work were provided by the Tufts Health Plan Foundation (see the previous page). The age-friendly Boston action plan, released in May 2017, contains 75 ‘concrete action items.” (Visit Boston.gov/age-friendly to read the city’s to-do list.)

“This is a serious effort by the city of Boston to take action,” says Michael Festa, AARP Massachusetts state director. “It’s not just a theoretical exercise.”

Among the issues addressed by the implementation plan are economic insecurity, social isolation among older adults, and the need to be both age-friendly and dementia-friendly.

“This plan is going to transform what the city looks like for the next generation,” Festa predicts. “I think people will look back and say, ‘Boston got it right.’”

Be an Age-Friendly State

New York and Massachusetts are

During the December holiday season in 2017, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced that New York had become the first state in the nation to enroll in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities. A month later, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker announced that his state would be the second to join the AARP age-friendly network.

The largest cities in each state were already members, with New York City joining under Mayor Michael Bloomberg in 2012, and Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh enrolling his city in 2014 (see the opposite page).

“Age-friendly is not about old age — it is about the value of all ages,” Cuomo writes in The Journal, a publication of AARP International. “It is about designing communities for everyone that strengthen people’s connections to each other, improve health, increase physical activity and support, and advance the economic environment through proactive design and future-based planning.”

In that same essay, Cuomo makes an important, often overlooked point.

“For far too long the aging population has been portrayed as one that contributes less and takes more,” he writes. “But here, we know that the social, economic, and intellectual capital that older adults contribute to their communities and to our state is unmistakable.”

Cuomo adds that “almost 700,000 older New Yorkers contribute more than 119 million hours of community service at an economic value of more than $3 billion annually.” He notes that older adults account for 63 percent, or $379 billion, of all the household income in the state.

Baker seconds the sentiments: “Many of Massachusetts’ older adults have the time, energy and talent available to start a second or third career, volunteer in their community, become a mentor, or pursue an unfulfilled passion,” he said at a ceremony enrolling his state. “Massachusetts embraces the opportunity to promote, celebrate and lead on aging.”

That’s an unanswerable question. Being an age-friendly state is an ongoing process in which goals are continuously set and pursued, problems are continuously identified and addressed.

The commitment and work encourage leaders to look through both an aging and lifelong lens in order to, says Nora Moreno Cargie of the Tufts Health Plan Foundation (see page 69), think about people living in a community for an entire lifetime. “If I were to look 10 years into the future, I’d want this work to be embedded and infused in everything that our city and state governments do.”

“According to AARP, 90 percent of New York residents surveyed say they want to retire in New York. And we want them to stay as well,” says Governor Andrew M. Cuomo, with his mother, Matilda, in 2015 to see Pope Francis lead Mass at New York City’s Madison Square Garden.

During his 2018 State of the State address, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker announced that the Bay State would be joining the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities.

Mayor Martin J. Walsh celebrates a special birthday with Boston resident Frances Sligh, who lives in an apartment building for people age 62 and over. “What does it mean to be an age-friendly city?” the mayor asks in his introduction to Boston’s age-friendly implementation plan. “It means a city that adapts its structures and services to be accessible and inclusive to residents of all ages and abilities.”
Inspire Community Engagement

Most people are part of a family in some way. Many people are part of a work or school environment. But when situations and daily structures change, because of a graduation, retirement or relocation, for instance, life can get lonely. Loneliness and isolation are especially worrisome matters for older people, who are frequently experiencing major life changes alongside declining health and sometimes a loss of friends and loved ones. In fact, depression and anxiety are among the most hazardous health conditions facing older adults (and many young people, too). That’s why it’s so important for people of all ages to have a life and interactions beyond the walls of their home. Communities need to both naturally and intentionally have ways for residents and visitors to be involved, to socialize, to learn and to share experiences.

To kick off a daylong event for people of all ages, age-friendly consultant Kelli Karen — outfitted as a cartoon icon of the festival — led the way. (Turn the page to learn more.)
A
n age-friendly community is a community that’s livable for people of all ages and life stages. The goal is for the nation’s towns, cities and neighborhoods to have housing, transportation and activity options that are suitable for the way people live, work and play throughout their lifetimes.

After Sarasota, Florida, hosted its inaugural Age-Friendly Festival in 2017, the organizers were very specific in explaining the gathering’s purpose and goals: “Turning an aspiration into a reality, the Age-Friendly Festival became the first community celebration in the nation to focus on lifelong well-being while connecting people of all ages.” (The emphasis is theirs.)

People age 65 and over represent one-third of Sarasota County’s residents, and more than half of the population is over age 50.

The county is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities (see page 7). Leading the area’s membership-related work is Age-Friendly Sarasota, a coalition of nonprofits, lots of volunteers, and representatives from academia, the local government and various business sectors.

“Every generation is living longer, and all ages are affected by this longevity revolution,” the initiative explains in its festival materials. “Age-friendly changes made today in the community will have a positive impact on future generations.”

From 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on a sunny Saturday in October, more than 4,000 people gathered on Sarasota’s streets — and at various indoor and outdoor venues — to participate in fun activities (including pickleball and alpaca petting), learn from exhibits and educational sessions, and enjoy good food, music, and dance and stage performances.

Age-Friendly Sarasota very much wants its successful example of community engagement to be replicated elsewhere, it says, in order to “promote age-friendly practices and principles and to further the conversation about what it means to be ‘age-friendly.’”

To access the initiative’s Age-Friendly Festival Resource Tool Kit, watch videos and download materials, visit AgeFriendlySarasota.org.

Host an Age-Friendly Festival for Everyone

Many think the term “age-friendly” is simply a polite way of referring to old people. It’s not.

For more information, visit AgeFriendlySarasota.org.

A
.commands for the Future

To build a better community for all ages

In 2015, through support from The Patterson Foundation and in partnership with community organizations, Sarasota County became the first municipality in Florida to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities (see page 7).

Two years later, inspired by Age-Friendly Sarasota’s work to “support people at all life stages and abilities,” the foundation presented the Age-Friendly Festival (featured at left) as a gift to the community with free admission and no fees for organizations to participate. The festival’s offerings reflected the foundation’s tenets of “Connecting – Learning – Sharing – Evolving – Strengthening.”

Created by Dorothy Patterson in 1997 with funds derived from her late husband Jim’s prominent media family, The Patterson Foundation is a fully endowed charitable foundation that works with “partners to accelerate positive change” because “the act of creative collaboration produces results and knowledge that can be applied more broadly to transcend any single act of philanthropy.”

Based in Sarasota, “The Patterson Foundation engages in innovative philanthropy in our region and beyond to create new realities,” says Debra Jacobs, its president and CEO. “This mission aligns beautifully with the age-friendly community model, which fosters learning and sharing among government, businesses, organizations and people as they work to build a better community for all ages.”

During the Age-Friendly Festival, Jacobs reinforced that model by explaining, “What age-friendly means is if it’s good for one generation, it’s good for all generations.”

Joining by representatives from AARP and Sarasota County’s Board of Commissioners, Debra Jacobs, head of The Patterson Foundation, cut the ribbon to begin the 2017 Age-Friendly Festival.
The large, gray concrete plaza at 4250 Connecticut Avenue NW, near the Van Ness Metro Station in Washington, D.C., is barren and lifeless. “A photograph of the Van Ness built-environment surroundings would show a stark, concrete plaza, devoid of life,” Theresa A. Cameron, executive director of the nonprofit organization Van Ness Main Street, explained. “The retail space is empty, and the surrounding buildings are monumental and unwelcoming. Van Ness has lost businesses and its daytime office crowd, which has taken a toll on local restaurants, shops and the vitality of the streetscape. There are limited activities where residents can meet and learn about each other. Residents don’t have a sense of place in Van Ness.”

Through community meetings and outreach efforts, Cameron, fellow residents and neighborhood groups decided that one way to bring life to the plaza would be to use it for a party. The invitation, from what they dubbed the Van Ness Social Club, read, in part: “Get to know your neighbors at a good old fashioned social. We’ll meet each other on the plaza … and learn some dance steps (including the first-ever dance move created especially for Van Ness!), drink tea, eat cake, play games, dance, and have conversations with each other.”

On the Saturday of the event, neighbors appeared for the late afternoon gathering. They sat at tables set up on the plaza, which had been decorated with a wall of colorful, oversized murals. They walked on a nearly block-long green carpet. They played human bingo and giant checkers. And they learned and then danced the “Van Ness shuffle.”

A comment board posted at the party was full of notes from participants sharing their experiences. “I met someone in my building I’d never met before,” wrote one. “The plaza is a great place to have an event,” said another.

In the book The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community, author Ray Oldenburg, an urban sociologist, writes that people need a third place to gather besides home and work. On that Saturday afternoon, a third place was created in a Washington neighborhood.
Watch the Most Golden of Athletes ‘Play Ball!’

The Kids and Kubs softball club has a strictly enforced age restriction of 75, meaning players under 75 need not apply.

Three times a week from November to April, four softball teams averaging 15 players each gather for a doubleheader at the North Shore Field in St. Petersburg, Florida. Shortstop Gaspar “Pee-Wee” Diiulis, who joined the team in 2011, says that back in the 1970s, he and his family vacationed in St. Pete from their Massachusetts home. “We used to watch the Kids and Kubs play, and here I am now doing it myself!” he says. Proudly cheering Pee-Wee on from the stands is his granddaughter Sarah Detore. “My grandpa at 80 is more active now than when he was in his 40s,” she observes.

Since the club’s inception in 1931, some half-million fans have seen the team in action. In the club’s early days, baseball legends, including Babe Ruth and Casey Stengel, would stop by during breaks from spring training and several umpires.

But Kids and Kubs wasn’t always a softball club. In 1930, local resident Evelyn Barton Rittenhouse founded a quilting club as “the proper sport for oldsters.” After a few quilting parties, the members complained that the events “were pretty dull stuff for a person with so much life.” Someone suggested they play softball, and “a group of the more robust ones” went on to form the Three-Quarter-Century Softball Club, later renamed Kids and Kubs.

Women were not a part of the club until Ethel Lehmann stepped into the batter’s box in 2004. Lehmann says she’s “still enjoying every minute” of the game she has played and loved since she was a young girl.

Don Osborn, who hung up his cleats after eight years, now maintains the club’s database. Kids and Kubs is a fixture in “city activities such as parades, annual games with City Hall members and other ball clubs in the area,” he says. It was a parade that introduced club secretary Ed Asay, nicknamed “Third-Base Ed,” to Kids and Kubs. “I was 65 and I knew that I couldn’t just walk onto the field when I turned 75, so I started playing softball with another club,” he recalls. “I saw the players well up in age playing ball, and I wanted to emulate them.”

Take a Kid at Heart on a Bicycle Ride

Because there’s no age limit on having fun by going fast.

Le Kassow was riding a bicycle in his hometown of Copenhagen, Denmark, when he passed an elderly man using a walker. Kassow started thinking about how sad it would be to lose the ability to ride a bicycle, to never feel the wind in your hair again.

A few days later, he rented a trishaw (like a rickshaw) and showed up at a nearby nursing home and asked if anyone wanted a ride. Gertrude said yes, and for the next hour as he pedaled, his passenger talked all about her life. When he returned to the home and told the staff about the outing, they said, “But Gertrude doesn’t speak.”

“That’s when it started dawning upon me the power of cycling together,” Kassow told a TED Talk audience. After that first ride, he founded Cycling Without Age. The movement Kassow launched has spread to more than 1,100 chapters worldwide. The first U.S. chapter, in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, was established in 2013.

“When we pedal down the driveway, I ask a few questions and the passengers suddenly open up,” explains Michelle Bachaus of the Wisconsin Bike Fed and the state’s Cycling Without Age program. “They are absolutely relaxed and invigorated at the same time.”

That happiness, Bachaus adds, spreads beyond the trishaw: “People in the community interact, smile and make sure our passengers feel special. One florist in New Holstein gives a flower to passengers as they roll by. Cafes offer coffee. We even get little ice creams from drive-throughs!”

“It really is about human connection, staying engaged and being visible in the community,” says Tracy McGinnis, director of philanthropy at the Southminster retirement community and head of the Cycling Without Age program in Charlotte, North Carolina, where the focus is on older people who live alone or in continuing care communities.

Working with the local parks and recreation department, Southminster has trained young “pilots,” as the trishaw cyclists are called, to engage with their older passengers.

“The initiative is to get both generations to see the value in connecting. Once that happens, younger generations are going to view elders differently and vice versa,” says McGinnis.

Bachaus agrees: “Cycling Without Age really is a social program, not a bike program. It’s all about asking the right questions and actively listening. The bicycle gives the feeling of freedom, and the older passengers just release. Everything they’ve held back just flows, like the wind in their hair.”

A regulation Kids and Kubs game is seven innings. Sliding is not allowed. In 2017, the team had 71 members, including two women. “We are a bunch of ‘good old boys’ — and girls — playing softball for fun and for the benefit of friends and tourists to St. Pete,” says Third-Base Ed Asay. “We are part of something really great: playing for the granddaddy of all senior softball clubs.”

In Neenah, Wisconsin, a Cycling Without Age “pilot” and his satisfied passenger.
Go Out for Dinner
To combat isolation, LGBT older adults are invited to supper

When Dale Mitchell, the executive director of Ethos, a nonprofit serving older adults in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts, was thinking about how he could provide the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community with a supportive and safe way to socialize, he hearkened back to the smoky, boozy bygone tradition of supper clubs.

Popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, supper clubs brought groups together in a private setting for themed evenings of food, wine and entertainment. In 2012, Mitchell revived the dining experience — minus the smoking and drinking — with Out4Supper, the Boston area’s first LGBT-friendly supper club.

The experiment, which began with a handful of participants, now attracts up to 50 LGBT older adults in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts. "These seniors are less likely to be partnered, and too often are estranged from their own family and friends," says Mitchell, a longtime advocate for the LGBTQ community. "Out4Supper has many regulars, different entrées as swordfish with pineapple relish and seafood linguine with lobster sauce."

"We found that there had been some self-segregation at earlier events," says Ethos community relations director Ray Santos. "We tailored marketing of Out4Supper to ensure participation among men and women. We also schedule it in the evening to include seniors who are still working."

The result, says Santos, is more than a nice meal: "Out4Supper has many regulars, different ages, and it’s really nice to see that people have lasting connections."  

Get Involved
Residents are encouraged to ‘Go outdoors, Go be creative, and Go make friends’

In 2017, the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) hosted a pop-up program featuring weekly painting classes. It launched the Chinatown Garden Club and garden. And it hosted an art exhibition of works created by community members.

Among the goals of the Go, Go, Go: Making Our Community More Livable project was to enable residents to build friendships in a linguistically and culturally accessible way. (One out of 5 Chinatown residents is an older adult and nearly 90 percent of those individuals have limited English proficiency.)

In 2017, at eight community centers and a handful of senior living communities, Silver Stars elves hosted holiday parties and delivered care packages to about 600 low-income or isolated seniors. Volunteers from Meals on Wheels aided the effort throughout the county, which covers roughly 850 square miles.

Every Silver Stars “present” contains items that were donated or purchased through donated funds. Typical gifts include toiletries, jigsaw puzzles, jumbo crossword books, magnifying glasses, manicure sets, gloves, scarves, hats, and blankets.

“The Silver Stars program has been spreading holiday joy since 1998.”

The holiday season is not the most wonderful time of year for everybody. For aging adults who live in isolation, or who are coping with the increasing loss of friends and family members, the end of the year can be a very unjoy, deeply depressing time.

That’s why the Silver Stars program puts sparkle into the season for hundreds of older adults in Terrant County, Texas, and the city of Fort Worth. “We just want them to know they’re not forgotten,” says Felicia Johnson of Silver Stars, which is part of Fort Worth’s Community Action Partners program.

About 200,000 of the county’s residents are 65 or over, and 8 percent of them live in poverty. Their needs are significant, but are sometimes overlooked in the scramble to serve the growing population of children in poverty. “We do so much for our kids — and they definitely need it — but we sometimes forget about our ‘older kids’,” says Johnson.

Give Gifts
Silver Stars brings a bit of sparkle to people in need of some joy

Silver Stars brings a bit of sparkle to people in need of some joy

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“Blankets are the favorite,” says Johnson. “They really love a warm, colorful blanket.”

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More than 150 people — ranging in age from 3 to 87 — participated. The turnout helped prove the need for a shared community space.

“Chinatown has grown significantly over the past decade, introducing an influx of high-income young urban professionals, but still does not have its own safe and accessible public space — a community center, library, rec center or park — to build community among its diverse residents,” notes John Chin, executive director of the PCDC. "The Go, Go, Go project demonstrated that accessible community events and clubs start important dialogues between disparate groups and unite them in taking ownership of their neighborhood.”

Philadelphia-based artists served as instructors for the Go, Go, Go project’s painting classes.
Create an Annual Report People Will Actually Read

A small city fights indifference to its yearly financial statement with the help of bad guys and — pow! kaboom! — a comic-book sensibility

The city of Bowling Green puts so much effort into the Over Fifty Citizen’s Academy, its coordinator explains, because the citizens who truly engage in the course become valuable resources: “We can tap into them as volunteers, as a sounding board or as community partners. When we ask, we know it’s not an uninformed opinion.”

Start a Citizen’s Academy

Get more people engaged in the community and understanding how it works, from who’s in charge of what to how it all gets paid for

Two dozen people at a time, the people of Bowling Green, Kentucky, are becoming more knowledgeable about their city and its government. That’s about how many residents have passed through the Over Fifty Citizen’s Academy every year since 2012.

The city’s Neighborhood & Community Services Department runs the free academy; AARP Kentucky and Western Kentucky University’s Center for Gerontology are supporting contributors.

Karen Foley, Bowling Green’s neighborhood-services coordinator, arranges a full week of activities, guest speakers and lunches for participants, introducing them to parts of the city government each day — sometimes in a classroom setting, sometimes by going out into the field.

Officeholders and staffers explain how budgeting works, what risk management is and what services are available for an aging population. Participants tour the police, fire and 911 dispatch operations. They take part in a Silver Sneakers fitness activity. They ride on Go BG, the city’s expanding bus system (which few of the academy’s students have done previously).

The last stop — many people’s favorite — is the Public Works Operations Center, home to snowplows, landscaping equipment and the sign-making shop. “Maybe because it’s unexpected,” Foley says, “people always appreciate meeting the folks behind the scenes.”

Why limit the course to an over-50 audience? People in that age group are more likely than those younger to be available for all of the five weekdays the academy is active, the thinking went. Plus, “the folks most active in neighborhood organizations are often older people,” Foley says, many because they’re accustomed to the role. If graduates become advocates, “that would be icing on the cake.”

In 2018, academy participant Anna Taylor was so appreciative of her experience that she wrote about it in the Bowling Green Daily News:

“I would like to tell anyone out there (who) has not been to one yet to go,” her letter to the editor says. “You will have fun while you are learning about all things Bowling Green.” Too bad, she adds, “that you can do it only once. No joke, you will be surprised at how much you don’t know about the city we love and all of the people (who) are working to make it that way.”

Dubbed “The World’s Most Amazing Annual Report,” Suwanee, Georgia’s 2016 financial accounting document tells the story of a small, thriving community where “happiness is at an all-time high.” But lurking in the background are four villains:

• Red Tape: “the master of bureaucracy”
• Main Stream: a “zealous killer of creativity”
• Disinterested Cat: “who cares about nothing”
• Status Quo: the “hater of change”

Woven into the 16-page comic-book-style document are all the facts and figures that take center stage in a municipal annual report — tax revenues collected, projects funded, plans approved and so on. Also included is an easy-to-understand glossary of what the various terms and accounting mumbo jumbo (e.g., “net investment in capital assets”) mean.

People look at an annual report and it’s a bunch of numbers and it’s boring,” says Abby Wilkerson, Suwanee’s public information officer and author of the report, which was illustrated by Paul Bara, the city’s graphic designer. “The numbers are still there,” she adds. “But the report tells their story in a more entertaining way.”

The nontraditional presentation matches Suwanee’s broader approach to governing, which is also exemplified by the glass-walled City Council chambers, the glass doors in City Hall, and the municipality’s online budget, which is updated daily.

“We want to show our citizens what we do, how we do it, and why we do it,” says Dick Goodman, who retired north to Suwanee from Miami, Florida, and was soon elected to the City Council.

City manager Marty Allen was intrigued by Wilkerson’s idea for transforming the customary report, which is mailed to Suwanee’s roughly 10,000 households and businesses. He welcomed the possibility of increasing the number of citizens who actually read the document.

Feedback has been positive, from points far and very near: “I can tell you one thing,” the city manager says. “This is the only annual report my 12-year-old son has read. That’s certainly a victory right there.”

Several panels are devoted to the money minutia. For the financial figures, a cartoon version of the city’s finance director goes head-to-head with the villainous Status Quo, who tries to frame Suwanee’s broader approach to governing, which is also exemplified by the glass-walled City Council chambers, the glass doors in City Hall, and the municipality’s online budget, which is updated daily.

The cover of the comic-book-style annual report features the cartoon alter egos of Suwanee’s City Council. The publication is the city’s Popular Annual Financial Report, a type of easy-to-understand accounting document that is prepared for the public.

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Meet, Greet and Have Something to Eat
Then sit on the back deck or in the living room and just talk.

Dane Kleis, the mayor of St. Cloud, Minnesota, has held a town hall meeting every week since taking office in 2005. He records a weekly two-minute video message. (Check them out on Twitter.) He hands out Neighbor of the Month certificates. (Neighbors nominate neighbors.)

Once a month, he invites a handful of people he doesn’t know to his house for dinner. Why? “For me, it’s invaluable to hear people’s thoughts about the city. And eating is a great way to stimulate a comfortable discussion,” he explains. (Kleis keeps a list of potential guests drawn from town hall meeting participants and people who have called City Hall.)

Kleis cites research that finds Americans’ greatest fear is public speaking. “This shows how it’s inherently difficult for many people to participate in public meetings,” he says. “The best way to get past that is to have a conversation.”

So the mayor cooks up chili (with and without meat) and sometimes bakes an apple pie. For his first-ever constituent supper, held in 2015, Kleis invited a barber, a nursing student, a football player from St. Cloud State University and a psychologist. “I try to reach out to people who have less influence in the city,” he explains. Until as recently as 1990, St. Cloud was 97 percent white. A period of strong economic growth brought ethnic diversity, and nearly 20 percent of the city’s 67,000 residents are people of color. More than 40 languages are spoken at home by people who have called City Hall. Kleis later told the Star Tribune, “We’ve been building community all that time.”

“I’m going to take it on the road.”

The mayor’s home, which is available to meeting organizers for free, has hosted hundreds of walking, rolling and caffeinated gatherings. The Town Halls for All options are a means for “getting citizens of all ages involved in charting the course” of the city. Price explains on her event’s Web page, by breaking “the mold of that traditional, worn-out, boring town hall meeting.”

An avid walker, Price invites people to join her on mile-long treks. (The pace is brisk but slow enough for “show and tell” conversing.) Or residents can join the avid cyclist for a casual (“no competitive racing”) 5-mile ride. Those preferring to sit can attend a Saturday morning coffee talk. Other ways to meet the mayor include competing against her in the annual Mayor’s Triathlon or dressing in costume for the annual Mayor’s Spooky Bike & Ball. Folks not into fitness or frolicking can engage on YourFortWorth.org, a 24/7 online public forum, which Price launched in 2013 so citizens could share and vote on ideas to improve the city without even having to get out and about.

Reach Out
Here are three ways three other mayors stay connected with their communities:

• In Henderson, Nevada, Mayor Debra March was easily able to come up with a name for her monthly gatherings. Each of her “March On” outreach events, held at various times and locations, focuses on a specific topic of interest to residents.

• The venues for the Tuesday Talks with Mayor David Uram of Crown Point, Indiana, are varied and unique. His community meetings have been held in taverns, a McDonald’s and a funeral home.

• Mayor Allison Silberberg created the Senior Advocacy Roundtable of stakeholders working to make Alexandria, Virginia, a successful city for aging in community. “We focus on finding ways that all these entities can join forces to ensure we are meeting the needs of our seniors,” she says. “Working together, we have gotten better results.”

Get Out and About
Want to meet the mayor? Grab a water bottle and start walking, bicycling or running.

A big city mayor can easily disappear into the duties and trappings of the job. (Kleis later told the Star Tribune, “I’m going to take it on the road.”) The mayor of a regional transit agency planned to scrap was the City Hall, announced that a minibus the City address, Kleis announced that a minibus the City Hall, and start walking, bicycling or running. Want to meet the mayor? Grab a water bottle and start walking, bicycling or running.

Get Out and About
Want to meet the mayor? Grab a water bottle and start walking, bicycling or running.

A big city mayor can easily disappear into the duties and trappings of the job. In Fort Worth, Texas (population 850,000), Mayor Betsy Price’s solution for staying connected with real people and places is to host or show up at fun events. Since 2011, the three-term chief executive has hosted hundreds of walking, rolling and caffeinated gatherings. The Town Halls for All options are a means for “getting citizens of all ages involved in charting the course” of the city. Price explains on her event’s Web page, by breaking “the mold of that traditional, worn-out and sometimes boring town hall meeting.”

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STEP Up and Speak with Someone New
Young and older Olympians make great strides by sitting around talking

When Ronan Piper, then a high school sophomore, began attending meet-
ings of the Sharing Teens and Elders Project (STEP) in Olympia, Washington, he was
aprehensive. Piper didn’t know what he, other teens and a bunch of people in their 60s, 70s, 80s
and 90s would be able to talk about for an hour.

He was pleasantly surprised. Piper enjoyed hearing about what the “elders,” as they are
called in the program, had lived through. One of
his favorite topics: the 1969 moon landing. For
Piper, speaking with the elders makes the
information in his history books real. He likes to
listen to what he has to say.

Piper’s experience delights Linda Terry, who
founded STEP in 2014. A cognitive fitness coach
and brain health educator, Terry created the
program after attending a salmon journey
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More than 100 teenagers and 70 adults have
taken part in the free program, which is
affiliated with Senior Services for South Sound.
Initially, the group played brain games, but the
attendees told Terry they would rather just talk.
Now she suggests discussion topics.

“It’s been amazing. The elders say they don’t
feel their pains, that they have hope for the
future. We are changing the social norm,” Terry
says, adding that the students “have never
pulled out their phones. It tells me how much
the teens crave conversation.”

Patricia Kennedy, a talkative, vibrant woman
in her 70s, moved to Olympia in 2014, having
spent 20 years as a coffee farmer in Costa Rica.
She finds that the teenagers are “curious about
things we did that changed history, such as the
Vietnam War and protests.” She notices how
the students and elders interact beyond STEP in
ways they hadn’t done before. “They see us as
real people,” Kennedy observes. “I really believe
we’re not invisible to them anymore.”

 monthly meeting of 50 participants at the
Olympia Senior Center. Teens wanting to join
must complete an application and go through a
short training session. The older participants
sign a code of conduct.

The gathering, she continued, “reignited my
way the tribe’s teens engaged with older people.

“I thought, ‘What would happen if I got
teenagers and elders together?’” Terry says. She
began with a dozen teenagers and as many older
residents. The gathering has since grown into a

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Jessica Nesset, a teacher at Nunaka Valley
Elementary School, was busy organizing wiggly
first-graders into a line so the day’s math lesson
could proceed. “Wagon pullers, are you
ready?” she asked the duo charged with pulling
a cart of magnifying glasses, books and other
supplies. “Let’s go to the park.”

The destination was Russian Jack Springs
Park in Anchorage, Alaska. The eastern
boundary of the 300-acre municipal park is just
yards from the school.

“As a class, they didn’t know where the park
actually was or what the concept of park actually
meant,” she says. “Many of the kids thought
parks were only swings and slides, so I began
discussing with them the fact that parks can
took different in many ways and that parks are
for everyone to use.”

After visiting the park and discovering what
was almost literally in their backyard, Nesset’s
class began brainstorming ideas for cleaning up
graffiti, posting useful signage and creating
outdoor learning spaces. The students also
wrote more than 20 letters to the Anchorage
Park Foundation, a local nonprofit, asking for
help to improve Russian Jack Springs Park and
access to it from the school.

With funds from an Anchorage Park
Foundation Challenge Grant and the logistical
support of a federal program called
Schools on Trails, math classes and other lessons are now
taking place beyond classroom walls. Outdoor
education spaces at the park, referred to as
“learning labs,” include three hubs for ongoing
exploration: hydrology, flora and fauna.

“A focus for the program is getting students
directly involved in projects at their own parks
and trails by gaining a feeling of ownership and
civic responsibility,” says Brendan Stuart, the
Schools on Trails coordinator.

When an interpretive trail about sled dogs
opened in Anchorage’s Balto Seppala Park,
dog-sled racer Debbie Clarke Moderow was
invited to speak to the students who had hiked
the mile from their elementary school for the
ribbon-cutting event. To her surprise and
delight, “Anchorage’s youngest citizens already
know much about our state’s history, our winter
trails, and our founding dogs,” she later wrote.

The gathering, she continued, “reignited my
own appreciation of the historic Iditarod Trail
—and its lasting inspiration to connect people
of all ages (and dogs) to this spectacular and
wild northern landscape.”

First-graders from
Turnagain Elementary
School set out for
Anchorage’s Balto
Seppala Park, which
was named after
Balto, the sled dog
that led the final
stretch of the 1925
Great Race of Mercy
to deliver an antitoxin
to combat a diphtheria
epidemic in Nome. The
lifesaving journey is an
inspiration for the
Iditarod, an annual
sled-dog race from
Anchorage to Nome.

Debbie Clarke
Moderow, who raced in
two Iditarods, was
on hand to answer
questions about
dog-sledding.
Recruit the Right Tech Teachers
When computers, cellphones and websites are the subject, it’s smart for seniors to learn from students

What brought Audrey Van Buskirk-Hoge to the gleaming, new computer lab at Piscataway, New Jersey’s senior center was her desire to become tech savvy so she could communicate better with her four grandchildren.

What kept her there was the free Senior + Computer Buddy program, which pairs an older adult in need of tech training with a high school or college student turned technology teacher. Council member Jim Bullard, a self-declared “aging activist,” helped start the computer lab program. “I wanted our seniors to be on the same page as their grandchildren,” says Bullard, who has taught Excel at the senior center.

Chor Lee, a retired telecommunications professional who teaches tai chi at the senior center, stepped up to take charge of the lab, easy-to-understand training materials. Like the students and other computer lab mentors, he volunteers his time.

“Getting senior citizens and teenagers to interact is healthy for both,” says Piscataway Mayor Brian C. Wahler, who directed that the architectural design for the senior center’s 2014 renovation and expansion include space for a computer lab. “I’m confident that older adults are learning valuable computer skills while great wisdom and life lessons are being passed down to our younger residents.”

Bruno Salgado, a college student who became Van Buskirk-Hoge’s computer buddy when he was 16, agrees. “One of the biggest lessons I learned from working with seniors is patience and coming up with ways to teach so they would understand.”

Salgado has since taught code and programming games to elementary schoolchildren. “The younger kids can’t understand high-level programming concepts, so I used what I learned from my work at the senior center, which was to teach to their level.”

Before the computer lab opened, Van Buskirk-Hoge found 21st-century tech intimidating. No more. She now knows how to access a live-stream of her granddaughter’s dance competitions. On a helicopter ride over the Grand Canyon, she was able to videotape the experience and send the footage to her family.

Van Buskirk-Hoge says the students in the buddy program are “so kind and respectful. I love them to pieces!”

Learn How to Sew
Knowing how to operate a sewing machine or even thread a needle is a skill many young people don’t have, so a Maine retiree is tying up those loose ends

The Boys & Girls Club in Augusta, Maine, was looking for creative projects to engage local teenagers after school.

When Carol MacDougall, a retired nurse and active volunteer, heard that five sewing machines had been donated to the club, she wondered if the kids might want to learn to sew.

When nearly 15 teens showed interest (more boys than girls, in fact), MacDougall decided to stitch together a sewing program.

Having been sewing since age 11, when an aunt paid her 25 cents for each wool skirt she made, MacDougall had the necessary skills, but “the machines were old and missing so many parts,” she recalls. And the club had no other sewing supplies, such as fabric, scissors, needles and thread, or an iron.

MacDougall sought and received help from Augusta Age-Friendly, an AARP-related initiative that put out the word on Facebook. The posting yielded three working sewing machines. A woman who collected fabric donated some of it, and a local bank chipped in $200.

When nearly 15 teens showed interest, MacDougall started the class, which quickly led her to think about making her own clothes, along with shirts, dresses and hoodies she can sell online. She wants to make a blanket with needlepoint on it for her younger sister — that is, once she learns to needlepoint.

“Getting young and old people to help and know each other.”

Harley, 15, had never used a sewing machine before joining MacDougall’s class, which quickly led her to think about making her own clothes, along with shirts, dresses and hoodies she can sell online. She wants to make a blanket with needlepoint on it for her younger sister — that is, once she learns to needlepoint.

“For me, sewing relieves stress,” says Harley. “I tend to have a lot of free time and get bored easily.” Plus, she adds, “I really, really like it!”

“They’ve been around longer than me and we get to learn lessons from them,” says Bryan. “We’ll be able to show our kids and they’ll show their kids.”

For MacDougall, sewing is the project but not the point of the program: “The point is to have an intergenerational back-and-forth, of getting young and old people to help and know each other.”

Adam, 15, got the hang of sewing in less than 10 minutes.

“I’m really good with machines,” he explains. “And working with someone older than I am is fun.” Among his creations: a red fleece blanket.

Bryan, also 15, became interested after spotting a piece of fabric decorated with the logos of wrestlers, including wrestler-turned-actor Dwayne “The Rock” Johnson.

“Why not learn to sew?” (Bryan later turned the wrestler fabric into a pillowcase for his cat Lacey to sleep on.)

That he’s learning from volunteers his grandparents’ age enriches the fabric of his life.

The Senior + Computer Buddy program at the Piscataway Senior Center in New Jersey is free “because local kids’ volunteering,” explains the center’s website.
**Experience Matters**

**Lead by Example**

A man with a record makes it his mission to reverse the trend

Antonio Hendrickson was 25 years old when he was convicted on drug conspiracy charges and sent to prison for 22 years, then the mandatory minimum under federal sentencing guidelines. Now in his 50s, Hendrickson sees himself in the dozens of New York City adolescents he mentors.

“I identify with them. All of those shenanigans they’re trying to play, I’m hip to it,” he explains. “More than that, I care about them — and they know it.”

Hendrickson began his mentorship work in prison, where he established a program that had older convicts counseling new inmates about the impulsivity and anger that often lead to crime and recidivism. After being released in 2013, Hendrickson was determined to use his experience to break the cycle of violence in his Harlem neighborhood and stop the flow of young people to prison, or worse.

Lead by Example Reverse the Trend, his nonprofit organization, was created to help prepare young people in disadvantaged communities for adulthood.

“These particular kids are emotionally challenged — not mentally challenged,” Hendrickson emphasizes. “They don’t know how to handle their emotions when they’re confronted with challenges, and it manifests in their behavior. They get into fights, disrupt their classes and get suspended.”

“They’re angry, and often with reason,” he adds. “Nobody listens to them. They have no voice, no power and no hope.” Often, the teens come from homes where their mothers work long hours and their fathers are absent, in prison or dead.

Hendrickson believes that when at-risk youth are armed with positive communication strategies and social skills, they can become productive, confident adults. Lead by Example runs school and community programs that bring together ex-convicts and “off-track scholars,” as Hendrickson calls them.

“We give them the support they need from somebody they can respect, trust and talk to,” he says.

Respect, trust and attention are the three things Hendrickson and his team of ex-offenders seek to provide every child, in endless measure, during Saturday morning basketball games, field trips and in classrooms throughout Harlem and the South Bronx.

“You’ll see. In just six to eight weeks, their thought process changes. Their behaviors change,” Hendrickson says. “And if you ask them, ‘Do you want more?’ they say, ‘Yes!’”

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**Lunch and Learn**

The menu’s weekly special: supportive time with a pal

Ron Diner’s first lunch pal was a 7-year-old named Tommy who lived in a Salvation Army group home. The two met for lunch in a school library, where Tommy, in the beginning, liked to sit with his favorite I Spy puzzle book across a table from Diner.

“After a number of weeks, he moved to my side of the table and put his arm around me and we did the book together,” Diner recalls. “Was this kid missing somebody? And did he find somebody in me?”

About 1,000 students in Pinellas County, Florida, have somebody on their side through the Lunch Pals program, which Diner, an executive at the financial services firm Raymond James, helped start in 2013 with Pinellas County Schools. The aim was to create a mentoring experience that’s so easy and obstacle-free for the participating adults that its organizers don’t even use the word “mentor” to describe it.

“Too many people say to themselves, ‘I can’t be a mentor!’ So I don’t use that word,” says Diner. “Anybody can do this. It’s just a couple of pals having lunch for a half-hour a week.”

The program grew out of a partnership between Raymond James and a single elementary school in the Tampa Bay area. “I met with the principal and asked her, ‘What are your challenges? What can I do for you?’” recalls Diner.

“And she told me, ‘I have kids who are homeless. I have kids who live in motels. I have kids from group homes, lots of single parents.’ She said to me, ‘We need mentors.’ I said, ‘We have 3,000 people at Raymond James. I think I can find some for you.’ I found 87 that year.”

The program has expanded every year. In 2017, the school district had Lunch Pals partnerships with more than 50 companies, plus dozens of churches and local government offices, resulting in more than 700 mentors at 81 schools, says Susan Schneck, the school system’s Lunch Pals coordinator.

Each mentor undergoes a background check and an hour of training, which Schneck can provide at the mentor’s job site. The training includes ideas for conversation starters.

“If the heart is willing, but they’re just a little intimidated by the idea of talking to a third-grader for 30 minutes, it’s helpful to have a few things in their back pocket,” says Schneck. “But I tell them, ‘You’ll likely expand your viewpoint, not just about the educational system but about today’s kids. You’ll see how they’re ready to sit down and talk.’”

“People tell me it’s the best 30 minutes of their week,” says Diner.

Students are identified for the program by their teachers or counselors.

“We stay away from it being a situation that might be too intense for a layperson to handle,” says Schneck. “It could be a student who isn’t as academically engaged as he or she used to be, or maybe something has changed in the child’s home and we anticipate it might have an impact, or maybe the student had a friendship go sour and just needs a little lift.”

Diner sets aside time to lunch with his two fourth-grader and his “lunch pal” for more than three years.

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*Image credit: Digital Image by Ira Block for AARP*
Program Solutions Together

Coders and community members brainstorm about making a city better for all.

Registrants for the Seattle hackathon — A City for All Ages — ranged in age from 16 to 82.

The potential for technology to solve social problems is yet to be fully discovered, but it has promise. That’s why Seattle, Washington, turned to its tech community (Microsoft, Socrata and Tableau live in the neighborhood) to brainstorm how the city can be more livable for people of all ages.

In September 2017, during the National Day of Civic Hacking weekend, City Hall hosted a three-day civic hackathon called A City for All Ages — ranged in age from 16 to 82.

What’s a Hackathon?

Hackathons are tools for good — at least when they’re public gatherings for working on community concerns or priorities. Such events are held en masse throughout the country on the National Day of Civic Hacking, an annual gathering that (according to the Code for America Brigade, a national network of community organizers and technologists) “brings together public servants, people with technology skills, and community organizers, to show that government can work in the 21st century if we all build it together.”

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During the hackathon, participants broke into nine teams to develop ideas for using data to improve Seattle’s outdoor spaces, address the social isolation that can come with age and increase transportation accessibility. The teams then competed to win some of the $10,000 in prize money provided by a 2017 AARP Community Challenge grant (see page 128).

The Best Overall Innovation winner — a team named Pandora for Streets — focused on improving the pedestrian experience by creating an app that maps the city’s sounds, smells (yes, smells), tree canopy, points of interest and other street-level information.

The team ColInfo Game won Best Accessibility Hack for creating a game that crowdsources bus stop information relevant to passengers with disabilities.

The SeaSidewalks team won Best Use of Open Data and Best Data Visualization for developing a mechanism that prioritizes sidewalk repairs based on a spot’s proximity to hospitals and other key facilities.

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With the hackathon, the city was able to promote both intergenerational and interdepartmental engagement. Seattle is a member of the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities (see page 7) and the event was part of its Age Friendly Seattle initiative, which began in 2016 and is continuing under Mayor Jenny Durkan, who was elected the following year.

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Have Fun in Parks for People of all Ages

Parents, sitters and grandparents who serve as caregivers and chauffeurs deserve to have some fun, too.

“I expect to have a tough time finding a parking spot!” says Justin Merkey, the director of parks, recreation and cultural arts for Gladstone, Missouri. “I expect to see folks of all ages. I can picture an older mom walking with her middle-age daughter along the trail and maybe the daughter’s little boys playing on the playground. Maybe there will be a challenge course, a climbing boulder and exercise equipment, including a tree house, pyramid and zip line. A vibrant gathering place with new playground structures, a children’s playground and adult area. I can picture an older mom, a 39.3-acre refuge in this city of 27,000, became a reality. While most of the park remains wooded and untouched, an 18-hole disc golf course is in the works and there’s a 7-acre section with multigenerational play structures, a children’s playground and adjacent ‘Adult Play Area.’

Until its redevelopment, this corner of Hobby Hill was mostly a tangle of primitive trails and natural areas of decay. Their neighbors agreed. In addition to play gear for kids and fitness stations for adults, the park will include the new must-have park feature for older adults: pickleball courts.

The two areas are in sight of one another, so an adult can work out and still keep an eye on a child. There is also a 3/4-mile trail that people of all ages can enjoy; plus a boardwalk that encircles a wetlands area, a picnic shelter and the playgrounds.

Howard and Sharon Johnson of Age Friendly Innovators realized their Central Point, Oregon, community needed an intergenerational park. Their neighbors agreed. In addition to play gear for kids and fitness stations for adults, the park will include the new must-have park feature for older adults: pickleball courts.

The game topics are based on the 8 Domains of Livability that impact the lives and well-being of older adults.
Create Thriving, Productive Communities

In too many places, shopping centers, strip malls and big-box stores have replaced Main Streets and downtowns. In too many places, the sights and scenes of an area can only be experienced or accessed from a car and, frankly, vary little from place to place. But think about the places people choose to visit. Those destinations have character and are often walkable. They’re also lively and economically thriving. Local leaders recognize that livability brings vitality. Building a community that works for people of all ages and life stages, from cradle through retirement, keeps a town, city or neighborhood humming.

It may look like child’s play, but these little painters had a big hand in creating a space that’s enjoyed by people of all ages and has helped enliven a local downtown. (See page 102.)
Stop and Shop
Retailers are recognizing the need to be age-friendly

The Hawaiian word for “older adults” is kūpuna. And with the older-adult population of Honolulu growing at a faster rate than in the rest of the nation, the city is home to a lot of kūpuna. In fact, by 2030, close to one-third of all the people in Hawaii will be over the age of 65.

As one of the first cities to join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities (see page 7), Honolulu has a head start on meeting the needs of this population. In 2017, the Age-Friendly Honolulu coalition launched Kind2Kūpuna, a public awareness campaign to help shops, restaurants, health care providers and many other public-facing businesses and offices better serve older adults.

“A workforce that is more aware and equipped to accommodate physical and cognitive changes with age will be better able to support older adults in many ways, both big and small,” says Sam Moku, a vice president at Hawaii Pacific University, an Age-Friendly Honolulu partner.

The Kind2Kūpuna campaign could, says Moku, “help new store employees anticipate the needs of older customers, and it could help a restaurant server de-escalate an order mix-up for someone with dementia. This campaign can lead to a taxi driver finding a better drop-off location for an older adult passenger with mobility limitations, and it could prompt a business owner to change the layout and lighting of her store.”

Kūpuna helped create the list, says University of Hawaii gerontologist Christy Nishita. Through surveys and focus groups, Nishita and her team learned that Hawaii’s businesses were perceived as being “only moderately age-friendly.”

The resulting poster (at right) features culturally appropriate tips to, she says, “help organizations train personnel, adjust operational procedures, and improve spaces to support the physical and cognitive challenges that can be associated with aging.”

In Iowa, Age-Friendly Greater Des Moines recognizes businesses that meet certain criteria for providing age-friendly service. Mullets Restaurant was the first to earn the Age-Friendly Business decal for its door.

While preparing its Kind2Kūpuna campaign and posters, Age-Friendly Honolulu learned that the most common complaints by kūpuna (older adults) about shopping are that “it is sometimes difficult to reach items in stores, and employees provide poor customer service, fail to smile and do not give eye contact.” (See page 68 for more about Hawaii’s kūpuna-friendly efforts.)
Travel Back in Time
A smartphone app transports pedestrians into the past

The Open Streets ICT event held in Wichita, Kansas, in September 2017 was the city’s inaugural effort at closing a busy roadway to vehicular traffic and opening it for bicycling, walking, running, dancing, yoga and more. (ICT, by the way, is Wichita’s airport code.) The Wichita Public Library and Bike Walk Wichita engaged in the festival by launching three Wichita History Walk tours through the app PocketSights. The tour option provided a fun activity for people who didn’t want to run, do yoga or literally dance in the streets.

The goal during the Open Streets weekend was to introduce the walking tour app to 100 people age 55 or over. More than 300 people in that age range responded. Use of the app now spikes whenever a downtown event occurs. For non-event walking, Wichita Mayor Jeff Longwell invites people to join him during his monthly, one-hour Walk-A-Longwell fitness forays.

Make Main Street a Main Attraction
Residents want to revere their community’s downtown, outsiders want to visit

The downtown district of Columbia, South Carolina, used to empty out after office workers hurried home at 5 p.m. On evenings and weekends you could scarcely believe that Columbia, the state capital, was the epicenter of a metropolitan region with 800,000 people. That’s because it wasn’t — people went elsewhere to shop, dine, hang out and have fun.

Times have changed.

“Main Street is the heart of every city, and every citizen is emotionally bound to it,” says Steve Benjamin, the city’s three-term mayor. “Ours has seen incredible growth and planning for both historic preservation and new construction.”

Since 2011 more than 50 businesses have opened, including 20 restaurants. The Soda City Market covers three blocks on Main Street every Saturday. “It packs the street with more than 100 vendors and thousands of shoppers, eaters and roammers,” reports the local State newspaper. Historic buildings have been converted into condos, and in 2014 a 20-story complex catering to students from the many local colleges debuted.

Honor the Past
A historic trolley leads to a lifetime of love

John and Joyce Aurelius met on a blind date in the 1950s. In the early days, John would be unavailable for long stretches on weekends. Joyce wondered who had his attention.

She soon discovered that it wasn’t a who but a what. John, an electrical engineer, was volunteering at the Shore Line Trolley Museum in East Haven, Connecticut.

Shore Line calls itself “the oldest continuously running suburban trolley line in the USA.” The museum is home to almost 100 trolleys and streetcars, 51,000 photos, 4,000 books and documents, and 1,000 artifacts such as tokens and ticket punches. For most visitors, the highlight is the three-mile round-trip ride through scenic marshlands.

John served as a motorman — a trolley operator or driver — and helped maintain the cars. Joyce found the trolleys interesting and also wanted to spend time with John, so she pitched in, too: selling tickets, washing windows, painting. They married in 1958.

Now in their 80s, the Aureliuses have stuck with the museum for six decades. (“Both our kids were sort of raised at the trolley museum,” Joyce says.) For a few years, they drove cross-country in the summer to spend two weeks there and John, mostly, drove up monthly when they lived in New Jersey. After retirement, the couple moved nearby.

John serves on the board and keeps up the museum’s Members Day picnic.

“A retired person should understand that one way to improve their lives is to volunteer,” suggests John.

“It’s physically and mentally healthy that you find something of interest to do,” adds Joyce.

“If you sit around thinking about how old you are, you’re going to be old.”

John as a trolley motorman in 1954 (far left). In the 1960s, Joyce (near left, in 1972) became the first woman to get through the training course and operate the trolley. “I had to fight for it,” she says. “It was definitely a guys’ world. No one came right out and said, ‘We don’t want you to take the class,’ but …”

John and Joyce Aurelius painting in 2014.

Volunteering in 1968 for the museum’s Members Day picnic.

“Ask me how to read, ‘Ask me how to walk, ‘Ask me how to volunteer,” says John. “We care about this place, and you’re welcome here.”

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John serves as a motorman — a trolley operator or driver — and helped maintain the cars. Joyce found the trolleys interesting and also wanted to spend time with John, so she pitched in,too: selling tickets, washing windows, painting. They married in 1958.

Now in their 80s, the Aureliuses have stuck with the museum for six decades. (“Both our kids were sort of raised at the trolley museum,” Joyce says.) For a few years, they drove cross-country in the summer to spend two weeks there and John, mostly, drove up monthly when they lived in New Jersey. After retirement, the couple moved nearby.

John serves on the board and keeps up the physical plant. Joyce, who had a career in marketing, focuses on the gift shop and gardens. (Well-kept gardens, Joyce explains, “say to our visitors, ‘We care about this place, and you’re welcome here.’”)

“Retired people should understand that one way to improve their lives is to volunteer,” suggests John.

“It’s physically and mentally healthy that you find something of interest to do,” adds Joyce.

“If you sit around thinking about how old you are, you’re going to be old.”

John as a trolley motorman in 1954 (far left). In the 1960s, Joyce (near left, in 1972) became the first woman to get through the training course and operate the trolley. “I had to fight for it,” she says. “It was definitely a guys’ world. No one came right out and said, ‘We don’t want you to take the class,’ but …”

Alleways are generally perceived as sinister places where bad things happen and good people don’t go. The truth is, alleys are whatever they’re used for. Those that aren’t intentionally used in a productive, pleasant way can turn bad.

The cities of Camden, South Carolina, and Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, each wanted to make good use of a neglected alleyway. Each received grant money from the 2017 AARP Community Challenge (see page 128) to transform an alley space into an attractive and useful connector.

Camden’s Main Street program transformed its Broad Street alley into a vibrant throughway for shoppers and diners. The city made the makeover a community event by inviting the public to stop by and then teaching visitors how to make stained glass–like globes out of tissue paper. The completed art pieces, LED string lights and UV shade canopies helped create a decorative, open ceiling. Benches and planters were later added to turn the space into an elegant outdoor gathering place.

The word “Oconomowoc” originated with the Native American Potawatomi people and translates as “waterfall” or “where the waters meet,” which makes sense since there are two neighboring lakes in the city’s downtown. The alley activation project showed the community how the useful but stark passageway could be a livelier link between the lakefront and the downtown retail area.

The alley wasn’t closed during the transformation work, and passersby were invited to join the rejuvenation process by painting a faux floor tile or several. Visitors asked about the transformation happening before their eyes. The project sparked conversations about how to activate the other downtown alleys so that each could have a unique look and offer a distinctive experience.
Build a Better Block
Here’s a before-and-after street plaza recipe for doing just that

Team Better Block is a placemaking-focused “public outreach” firm of urban planners and architects who travel worldwide to temporarily reengineer “auto-dominated, blighted, and underused urban areas into vibrant centers.” AARP partnered with the Dallas-based consultants to launch several pop-up demonstration projects in three communities that are featured in this edition of Where We Live. (The project shown here was held in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in November 2017. See pages 40, 46 and 106 for others.) When the Better Block crew works in a community, it works with the community. The team offers the following advice and a “recipe” for how to successfully pop into a community (even your own) to lead a pop-up project.

STEP 1: Get the community involved
The people who live or work in the community will determine whether a Better Block effort will be successful. Organizers need to have an outreach plan for seeking input from residents, businesses, stakeholders, advocates, sponsors, organizations, nonprofits, politicians, government officials and potential volunteers.

STEP 2: Use placemaking principles
Every community has its own character. Determine which design elements (parklets, bike lanes, etc.) can demonstrate the vision of the neighborhood.

STEP 3: Program the event
Programming is key in creating a pop-up event. The formula for programming is simple: comfort + food and beverages + activities. Having something to do gives people a reason to go to a place — and return. Having seating that’s comfortable, clean and located in the right spots is critical.

STEP 5: Collect data
Gather data that will move the long-term plan forward. Data collection might involve measuring vehicle speeds or conducting surveys.

STEP 6: Make it permanent
The lasting impact of a project depends on the community’s goals. Pop-up projects are temporary but they plant the seeds for long-term change.

A Bit About Build Workshops
Pop-up events require people to work together to make and place things. Try to use materials and resources that are found in the community. Volunteers are typically organized into three work teams:
- Art and Beauty
- Streets and Public Places
- Pop-Up Programming
Prepare in advance but be ready to improvise. Magic happens when people with enthusiasm and cool ideas are free to implement them.

Painting the Street Purple, White and Blue

Supplies: Push brooms, measuring tape, chalk or a chalk line reel, industrial-grade duct tape, paintbrushes, paint rollers and poles, paint trays and paint (acrylic if permanent, tempera if not).

Instructions
1. Decide on a design
2. Use the push brooms to remove debris
3. Create a frame for the design by applying the duct tape to the street’s surface
4. Measure and then mark with chalk the spots that will be covered (or “masked”)
5. Use duct tape to cover the negative (or unpainted) spaces
6. Apply the tape to the surface
7. Pour the paint into the trays and apply with the rollers
8. Allow to dry (30 to 60 minutes), then remove the tape

Tip: Pull the tape up at a 45-degree angle to avoid peeling off the paint.
There is such a thing as no-mow grass. Why such a product isn’t used everywhere, we can’t say. But the specialized seeds that produce grass that only grows 6 inches tall and needs to be mowed only twice a year have enabled a community in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to take control of several vacant, contiguous lots.

“The vacant lots had become dumping sites, overgrown with weeds and debris,” explains Jarvis Brown of Tri County Community Action, a private, nonprofit community development agency that’s part of the Community Action Partnership, a national poverty-fighting network. “The lots,” he adds, “also provided ample cover for illegal activities.”

The Reseed & Transform initiative is part of the South Allison Hill neighborhood’s strategic plan, titled Heart of the Hill. The goal is to transform vacant and overgrown lots into usable spaces for the community.

“This is especially important to our seniors and other vulnerable populations,” says Brown, “since they struggle to maintain these areas or lack the resources to do so.”

For the lot shown at right, volunteers and residents provided the labor, while AARP and others helped fund the supplies, including the split-rail fencing. “Neighbors have noticed how much better it looks, and several have agreed to keep an active watch over the lot and keep the area looking nice,” reports Brown.

A vacant corner in the Fruit Belt neighborhood of Buffalo, New York, also received a lot lift. On an autumn Saturday in 2017, the urban designers of Team Better Block worked with AARP New York, the Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency, the office of Mayor Byron Brown and residents to enliven the empty space. Picnic tables with seating were added. A dozen standing planters (also called raised beds, see page 61) were brought in. Solar lights were installed to increase nighttime visibility and safety.

Says Randy Hoak of AARP New York, “The project provided a great opportunity for Fruit Belt residents of all ages to engage and connect with their community in a new and more inclusive way.”

Having something to do gives people a reason to come to a place — and return, say the urban planners of Team Better Block. The mural was created by a Fruit Belt resident through Buffalo, New York’s Locust Street Art. The stage provides the neighborhood with a space for gathering as well as performances.
Rethink the Purpose of Some Parking Lots
If a parking lot is routinely empty, it’s an empty lot, not a parking lot

The revitalization of downtown Kuna, Idaho, was full speed ahead. Businesses were fixing up storefronts. Crumbling sidewalks were replaced with new surfaces and widened. Street lighting, benches, bicycle racks and landscape beds were spruced up. Streets were repaved.

All was on pace, except for one key element: the Bernie Fisher Parking Lot, which is adjacent to a hiking and biking trail, the Kuna Senior Center and the downtown business district. The lot was blighted. But it had great potential — as a pedestrian-friendly public plaza rather than the oversized, largely vacant space it had become. The Downtown Revitalization Plan deferred the lot’s redesign for a later community process.

To spark that process and the community’s imagination, the city and Idaho Smart Growth hosted the Park for a Day event so residents could experience a sample plaza in the parking lot. There was live music, a food vendor and sketches of the ways the acreage could be transformed.

Attendees were welcome to create their own designs. The suggestions tended toward using the space for a series of short-term, recurring events, such as an Oktoberfest, Christmas Village, Renaissance fair or themed dance nights.

Observed Scot Oliver, executive director of Idaho Smart Growth: “With suggestions from visitors and our recommendations, the city of Kuna has solid support for making improvements to the space that will be more than just paving and striping.”

Provide Parking for People
On many Main Streets, cars get the best spots

Undermined by a nearby shopping mall, downtown Renton, Washington, battled back in the mid-1990s with major public and private reinvestment for impressive new projects: a transit center, mixed-use buildings, a town square and more. But the work isn’t done. Residents want safer streets and more things to do. Businesses want more shoppers.

One enticement has been an event called Pop-Up Downtown, in which community groups or businesses take over an on-street parking spot and turn it into, well, a place.

The local arts commission and library set up parking-spot art classes and poetry readings. A business group set up parking-spot games for children. But the most popular parklet by far was hosted by Merrill Gardens, an independent-living and continuing-care facility. One of its 600 residents, Daisy Ching (pictured), created a pirate-ship-themed gathering space.

Renton’s annual event coincides with PARK(ing) Day, a global celebration of parklets. The event dates back to 2005, when the San Francisco design collective Rebar paid for two hours on a parking meter and then transformed a parking space into a park — complete with turf, a tree, a bench and signs inviting passersby to relax. The first worldwide PARK(ing) Day was celebrated in 2006 with 47 parklets in 13 cities across three countries. It’s grown ever since.

Renton built on the phenomenon by attracting participants to Pop-Up Downtown in 2016 and 2017, with parklets as well as outdoor markets and food trucks. Its collaborators for 2018 identified a goal: to create a parklet that will be installed permanently.

In downtown Kuna, Idaho, an often-empty parking lot is ideally located to serve many other purposes. To help people envision a future for the space, local designers sketched several options. The drive-in movie and ice-skating rink got top votes — as did the suggestion from a resident to create a water park.

P.S. AARP Community Challenge grants (see page 128) helped fund the Kuna, Idaho, parking lot pop-up event as well as the parklet project in Renton, Washington.

The pirate ship parklet, created and hosted by the residents of a local independent-living facility for older adults, won Renton’s People’s Choice Award for Best Parklet. Passersby were encouraged to put on pirate gear and pose for photos.

Daisy Ching was the parklet’s creative force and painter. After the event, “downtown business owners reported that they’re seeing more of the older residents walking the downtown streets and settling into coffee shops on a more regular basis,” says City Administrator Jessie Kotarski.

Daisy Ching was the parklet’s creative force and painter. After the event, “downtown business owners reported that they’re seeing more of the older residents walking the downtown streets and settling into coffee shops on a more regular basis,” says City Administrator Jessie Kotarski.
Provide Places for People to Sit
Pedestrians, from an 18-month-old to an 88-year-old, benefit from having a seat so they can get off their feet.

Look along the streets you walk, drive or ride. It’s likely you’ll see one or several bus stops where passengers are standing and waiting. And they’re standing because the only place to sit is on the ground.

Public places to sit for a bit make communities, spaces and places more livable for people of all ages. While it’s true that older people often need to take a break when they’re out and about, so do toddlers, pregnant women, people who are on their feet all day, anyone wearing uncomfortable shoes. The list goes on.

In Jackson Hole, Wyoming, several dozen older adults and people with disabilities live across the street from the bus stop shown in the before-and-after images below. Also nearby is a housing complex where many young families live.

“All of these residents will benefit from having a safer, more comfortable and aesthetically pleasing place to wait for the bus, and it will encourage them to more fully participate in the larger Jackson Hole community,” wrote Becky Zaist, executive director of the Senior Center of Jackson Hole, in an application to the AARP Community Challenge (see page 128).

With the funding granted and the cleanup complete, she shares that “neighbors came out to help us dig the very hard, rocky soil for the garden area. One neighbor has volunteered to water the plants, another brought strawberry plants to put in the garden, and yet another has volunteered to remove snow from the bench in the winter.” Next on the wish list: installing a bus shelter (see page 48 to read about one of those).

To encourage pedestrian traffic, the very small city of Port Orford, Oregon (population 1,159, average age 56), installed seating with attached planters (pictured). The benches give the business district a boost and “provide a needed place for people to rest, people watch, talk to friends and enjoy the town,” explains Karen Auborn, president of the Port Orford Street Revitalization Association.

She adds that immediately after the installation, “People were sitting on the benches despite it being cold and the off-season.”

AARP grant funding helped the senior center in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, clear weeds and trash from a bus stop with no seating and install a bench and landscaping. The owner of the property behind the bus stop contributed the new rail fence.

A construction crew from a nearby correctional facility built four bench-planter combos in Port Orford, Oregon. High school students are making plaques to recognize the inmates for their work and AARP for helping to fund the building supplies.

Using grant funds from AARP, Orange County, North Carolina, purchased Simme-Seats (pictured) for installation in areas where there was no bus stop sign or it was not feasible to install a full-fledged bus shelter.

Public seating is part of the playlist in Yountville, California, where an open plaza in front of the community center is sometimes set up like an outdoor living room, with coffee tables and couches arranged for having conversations. The space also has two pianos at which anyone can sit and tickle the ivories, regardless of talent.
There’s not a lot for a young or much older person to do in the South Macon area of Macon, Georgia. There aren’t real places to go within the neighborhood. The closest park or recreational center is more than five miles away.

South Macon Arts Revitalization Technology (SMART) was created in 2015 to “enhance the community by redefining the culture of an area that is marginalized and seemingly forgotten.” The all-volunteer, grant-funded effort uses an “asset based” community development approach to its work, meaning it builds on the talents, resources and interests that already exist within the community.

Recognizing that years ago — before 24/7 television, air-conditioning and smartphones — sitting outside and talking over a game of chess or checkers was a popular pastime, SMART used funds from a 2017 AARP Community Challenge grant (see page 128) to purchase outdoor chess and checkerboard tables and two oversized Connect Four games.

“Chess, checkers and Connect Four are games that require critical thinking, patience and skill,” explains Frankie Lewis, secretary of SMART, noting that many older people in the neighborhood are accomplished chess and checkers players. “We want to make sure their skills don’t get lost due to the lack of activity, and we want the elders in our community to share their knowledge with people here of all ages, but especially our youth.”

At the ribbon-cutting event to celebrate the game installations, people of all ages (see the photos) began to play.

A nonprofit in Macon, Georgia, is rehabbing a church-donated house and yard into a community center and park. In addition to the checkerboard tables (pictured), there are plans for a fenced playground and basketball court with lighting so the space can be used at night.

Provide Places for People to Just Be
Games that people of all ages enjoy can reconnect a community

Preserve Special Spaces
A private home with a grand garden is a gift for generations to come

William Joslin and Mary Coker Joslin, longtime residents of Raleigh, North Carolina, decided that upon their deaths, their 1950s-era home and its 4.5 acres of gardens, trails, forests and streams would be given to the City of Oaks Foundation to preserve their property for public use and enjoyment.

“Mary liked to call her garden, with its many trees and shrubs, ‘the lungs of the neighborhood,’” reported an obituary after her death in 2016 at age 93. William, a prominent attorney, had died five years earlier at age 90.

In consultation with the city, the foundation has been transforming the unfurnished house and the surrounding green spaces — collectively called Joslin Garden — into a center for educational and community programs about art, nature, history and gardening.

In 2017, the foundation used an AARP challenge grant (see page 128) to organize an “OAKtoberfest” celebration. The house opened for a tea party, the gardens served as a setting for plein air (outdoor) painting, and the woods hosted “OWL-oween,” a family-friendly nature presentation featuring a variety of live birds, nine kinds of owls, a vulture, plus bats.

The events were good for community relations. “Some had questioned whether the property would become a public park and what that would mean,” explains Chris Heagarty, executive director of the City of Oaks Foundation. “Instead, neighbors could see the place as a special amenity that provides high-quality programming and events within easy walking distance from their homes. The activities helped to build the long-term acceptance that’s needed from the neighborhood in order for Joslin Garden to succeed.”

Two dozen visitors spent a day painting garden scenes. The property’s former owners “always believed that parks and greenways are a large part of what makes Raleigh a vibrant and healthy place to live,” states the City of Oaks Foundation. “By donating their home and garden … the Joslins’ plan for their garden is to give all visitors to and citizens of Raleigh another natural haven from urban life.”
Share Spaces

Communities save money, and residents mingle more, when public buildings and facilities meet multiple needs and serve the most people.

The Emeryville Center of Community Life (ECCL) in Emeryville, California, has been called an urban version of the old town square, a place where all members of the community, regardless of age or economic background, come together for social, educational and recreational activities.

The chatter of young children and spirited high school students gives a positive energy to the contemporary center that houses the city’s elementary school, intermediate school and high school in separate buildings. Another building contains the city’s community services offices, the school district offices, a “lifelong medical care” center and dental clinic. The clinics enable students to stay on campus instead of leaving for health appointments.

The center has a multipurpose community room, library and gymnasium, which includes a basketball court, dance studio and weight-and-exercise room. There’s also a swimming pool and an athletic field made of environmentally friendly cork.

Incorporated in 1896, Emeryville was once more of an industrial hub than a community. In fact, much of the land in the one-square-mile city was contaminated because of its manufacturing past.

Remediation and revitalization enabled the arrival of housing, retail, transit options and high-profile corporate headquarters, including those of Pixar Animation Studios, Leapfrog, Clif Bars, Jamba Juice and Peet’s Coffee.

The small city (population 12,000) backs up to the San Francisco Bay and is surrounded by Oakland and Berkeley, often drawing residents from those cities to the ECCL and Emeryville’s senior center, about two blocks away.

“The socioeconomics of this area are that there are a lot of low-income people here and we want to be able to provide services to them,” says Pedro Jimenez, Emeryville’s community services director. “We have a high population of seniors in the area, so ECCL contains a seniors’ lounge, where they can hang out, hold seminars and attend exercise classes.”

The community’s older adults are beginning to integrate into the predominantly young population at the center. “We had groups of children go over to the senior center to teach them how to use their phones,” notes Jimenez.

“We get all ages in our aquatics program, from 15-year-olds to seniors,” says Recreation Coordinator Stacy Thomas. “Our seniors are super fun, and they love the energy that the young people bring. The energy of our kids and the seniors getting their ‘Y.M.C.A.’ song hands up in the air — it’s great!”

To provide revenue and help offset operating costs, parts of the ECCL can be rented for functions, such as meetings or parties.
Prepare People and Risk-Prone Places
Flexible spaces, social networks and savvy seniors can be key to surviving the storm

In 2017 alone, three major hurricanes hammered the East Coast, the Gulf Coast and the Caribbean, killing hundreds and devastating communities from Houston and the Florida Keys to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands (see page 118).

Meanwhile, mudslides in California, wildfires throughout the West, heat waves in the Southwest, drought in the Dakotas, massive storms on the Great Plains, tornados across the South, and flooding in Missouri and Arkansas brought unprecedented destruction.

At $306 billion, it was, financially, the costliest year on record for natural disasters, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Centers for Environmental Information.

“Communities are increasingly complex, and so are the challenges they face,” states the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services’ Office for Preparedness and Response. “Human-caused and natural disasters are more frequent and costly. Factors like climate change, globalization, and increased urbanization can bring disaster-related risks to greater numbers of people.”

Today, staying safe during storms and other emergencies means more than planning evacuation routes and shelters. Community resilience strategies focus on strengthening physical infrastructure and social networks so they don’t collapse when a disaster strikes, whatever its cause — natural or man-made. Part of that means using spaces in a different way.

After Hurricane Katrina nearly leveled the Bayou View West neighborhood in Gulfport, Mississippi, in 2005, the Federal Emergency Management Agency bought out the remaining residents and handed the property over to the city. Funded by an AARP Community Challenge grant (see page 128), Gulfport’s first dog park, the Bark Park, attracted more than 200 happy people and dogs on its opening day in 2017. If the area floods again, homes won’t be at risk. And once the park dries out, people and pups can return.

Interestingly, a 2018 report from the Rand Corp. cites aging-in-place initiatives as a key solution for minimizing the damage caused by crises. That’s because such efforts generate community resilience, which Rand defines as “the sustained ability of a community to utilize available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations.”

Although people 65 and over are, per the Rand report, “especially vulnerable to natural disasters,” the authors note that “older adults can also contribute assets to disaster response: They can draw on their experience, resources, and relationships—building skills to prepare themselves and to support others during an emergency.”

“This has been neglected for a long time, and it’s about 40 acres,” Gulfport Mayor Billy Hewes noted when the Bark Park opened on November 29, 2017. “We have an opportunity to do something with easy access, high visibility, water access. It’s not only going to be a dog park. This is just the start. We’re putting a kayak launch in. We’re going to put in some walking trails, some bike trails... There’s a disc golf course out here, too. This will be a continuing improvement. It’s an opportunity for us to create a better sense of place for residents and visitors.”

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner (wearing cap) at Houston’s Emergency Operations Center.

The need for resiliency is a fact of life — not just an abstract concept — in Houston, Texas. “Over three years, we’ve had three big floods in Houston,” Mayor Sylvester Turner points out.

In August 2017, Hurricane Harvey pounded the city with 50 inches of rain, flooding 300,000 homes and killing dozens. Earlier that year, an April storm brought 17 inches of rain, flooding more than 700 homes and killing eight people. Over the Memorial Day weekend in 2015, 12 inches of rain soaked Houston in 10 hours, killing seven and forcing 13,000 to seek disaster assistance.

All three events were classified as once-in-500-years floods. “It’s amazing no more people were killed, considering the magnitude of these storms — but any death is too many,” says Turner.

Houston’s resiliency plan seeks to ensure the sprawling city’s security and continued growth. A year before Harvey struck, Turner appointed a chief resiliency officer (also known as the “flood czar”). “I believe there must be a person who reports directly to me and has the sole responsibility of implementing drainage and flooding strategies,” the mayor says.

Turner wants all new homes to be at least two feet above ground, with those in a flood plain being at least two feet higher than the projected 500-year flood level. Better storm-water-management measures are being pursued. There could be buyouts of homeowners in particularly flood-prone locations.

“We can continue to grow by building smarter than in the past,” Turner says. “We just can’t build anywhere.”

When the Napa River floods, this Napa, California, park and trail area is closed off by levees and solid gates, thus saving the adjacent business district and community from the water and fast-moving logs propelled by the rapids. The bench in the photo is bolted to the cement, so it stays in place even when submerged.
Enable Resilience for the Days (and Weeks and Months) After the Storm

Readiness and relationships are keys to survival

America has 50 states, but AARP has 53 state offices. That’s because we also serve the residents of Washington, D.C., as well as Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. In 2017, massive hurricanes devastated the Caribbean islands.

AARP staff in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands juggled caring for themselves and their own families with meeting the desperate needs of local AARP members — as well as nonmembers of all ages.

The articles on these two pages are first-person accounts from the two AARP state directors who prepared for, lived through and have been working to help their communities recover from a season of unprecedented storms.

Be Prepared
By Troy Schuster, State Director
AARP U.S. Virgin Islands

September 2017 marked the first time in recorded history that two Category 5 hurricanes struck the same area within two weeks.

Hurricane Irma made landfall on the British Virgin Islands and the northern U.S. Virgin Islands of St. Thomas and St. John. Forty miles to the south, St. Croix experienced sustained tropical-storm winds with hurricane-force gusts.

Two days later, the tables were turned. Hurricane Maria landed on Puerto Rico and St. Croix. The northern U.S. and British islands, already devastated by Irma, experienced tropical-storm winds with hurricane gusts.

The hurricanes severely damaged hundreds of homes in the U.S. Virgin Islands. All of the hospitals sustained significant damage, necessitating the air evacuation of patients to the U.S. mainland. Cell service in the Virgin Islands was limited. Streets were full of debris and utility wires. Large trees fell and those that remained standing no longer had leaves.

The U.S. Virgin Islands had experienced devastating hurricanes before, including five major ones since Hugo in 1989. Each storm taught us lessons about hurricane-proof construction and hurricane preparedness.

The Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency (VITEMA) — the local equivalent of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) — and the Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR) are repositories of lessons learned.

When Hurricane Hugo struck the Virgin Islands three decades ago, it caused complete devastation to roughly 90 percent of the homes and buildings on St. Croix and hundreds on St. Thomas and St. John. Subsequently, DPNR revised the building codes, and utilities were made more resilient, thereby minimizing the damage caused by hurricanes Irma and Maria.

VITEMA, under the direction of Mona Barnes, interfaced with FEMA, the U.S. Department of Defense, the U.S. Armed Forces, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Virgin Islands National Guard. VITEMA also coordinated rescue and recovery efforts.

The response was amazing, but preparedness work continues.

The local government and utility companies continue to improve our storm readiness. AARP is participating in the development of Complete Streets policies (see page 40) that include provisions to decrease flooding by improving drainage and prevent drowned power lines by the managed trimming of the islands’ large, protected mahogany trees.

While it did take five months for electricity to be fully restored, and telecommunication services were still limited six months after the storms, every person in the U.S. Virgin Islands had access to food, water, fuel and medical care in abundance from Day 1.

Although the U.S. Virgin Islands was well prepared, the storms of September 2017 have taught us how to be even more resilient.

Know Your Neighbors
By José Acarón, State Director
AARP Puerto Rico

On September 19, 2017, people on the U.S. mainland asked if we were prepared for the Category 5 hurricane that would make direct landfall on Puerto Rico the next day.

We believed we were ready, although I was unnerved, having watched a TV meteorologist explaining, with tears in her eyes, how “at 150 mph the air we breathe becomes solid.”

For 12 eternal hours, we remained in our homes, occasionally peeking through windows as the furious storm ran its course. When the hurricane ended, those whose homes were intact and not in the path of raging floodwaters seemed relatively lucky. Reality set in when we stepped outside.

With the electricity down, we had no radio or television, no refrigeration or air-conditioning, no water, no telephone service, no Internet. Propane for cooking was scarce. Because the roads were blocked by debris, the world for many on the island was reduced to only the people and places within a small radius of where they lived.

When life as you know it literally changes overnight, what do you have? Some people have their family right beside them. Others have only their neighbors. That’s when the word “community” takes on a different and perhaps its truest meaning.

In crisis circumstances, neighbors become family and a neighborhood becomes a family. We now relied on the people we saw and waved to every day but might have barely spoken with before.

One of the biggest lessons learned from Hurricane Maria was that the more widespread and disconnected communities are — such as in rural areas or sprawling, unwalkable suburbs — the more susceptible people are to the hazards that come with disasters. When modern infrastructure and services collapse, the luxury of space and privacy transforms into isolation and vulnerability.

Neighborhoods that are more compact and walkable better enable residents to have integrated, participative lives regardless of age. Such communities can also be lifesavers during and after a natural disaster.

So many people living in the mountains of Puerto Rico, in areas fully isolated by the storm’s shutdown of roadways and transportation systems, died because they couldn’t access medical care. It’s disheartening that previously healthy people had had their health compromised because they lacked basic services and access to safe food and water.

Having survived this life-changing event, I understand firsthand the necessity of building more resilient and integrated communities. Doing so promotes solidarity and security for all residents in times of an unstoppable disaster — and, perhaps more importantly, during every day of our lives.

The U.S. Virgin Islands knows how to weather hurricanes, but the one-two punch of the 2017 season was a first. AARP U.S. Virgin Islands staff (that’s Diane Capehart, pictured) distributed relief supplies in Christiansted, St. Croix, and elsewhere.

Once AARP Puerto Rico staff and volunteers were able to get out of their homes and back to work, they distributed more than 7,000 bags of groceries to older people living alone in 26 towns, including in the barrio Rio Jueyes of Coamo.
Be Kind and Compassionate
As the Dalai Lama says, ‘Creating cultures of kindness and compassion throughout the world is the key to achieving world peace’

A n international delegation journeyed to the northern Indian city of Dharamsala in early 2018, where they met with the Dalai Lama, the exiled leader of Tibet.

Among the officials on the trip, which was organized by the international Strong Cities Network and funded by the U.S. Embassy in India, was a bipartisan duo: Greg Fischer, the mayor of Louisville, Kentucky, and Tom Tait, the mayor of Anaheim, California.

The three men had met before. Each was using his position as a leader to encourage and promote empathy and caring.

“Both cities have led a parallel movement on promoting human kindness and compassion, a cause championed by His Holiness,” states the website of the Central Tibetan Administration in a posting about the mayors’ meeting with the Dalai Lama (pictured).

Fischer signed a resolution in 2011 committing to a multyear Compassionate Louisville initiative. “Being a compassionate city is both the right thing and the necessary thing to do to ensure that we take care of all of our citizens,” Fischer said. “There’s a role for all of us in making sure no one is left behind or goes wanting.”

In Anaheim, Tait launched the Hi Neighbor campaign in 2011 to encourage residents to knock on one another’s doors and introduce themselves. In 2017, Anaheim officially adopted the motto “City of Kindness.”

Tait became intrigued by the potential of kindness to improve his community when he was a City Council member and a holistic doctor told him that with a city, as with the human body, one could either treat symptoms of illness or stimulate healing from within. The concept resonated with Tait so strongly that when he ran for mayor in 2010, he promised to make kindness a civic cornerstone.

“The idea is that if you could actually change the culture, that affects everything,” Tait explains. “If everyone is a little kinder, literally everything gets better.”

The Anaheim mayor sees kindness as an antidote for problems ranging from school bullying and drug addiction — which, he says, is “really a function of isolation and lack of kindness” — to the neglect of older adults.

“You can sit on your couch and be nice, respectful, considerate, empathetic and even compassionate. But to be kind, you have to get off of your couch and do something for someone else,” Tait explains in an essay titled “Why Kindness?” He continues: “Kindness is an action word. It’s a word that can change a family, a neighborhood, a school, a city, a nation and, ultimately, our world.”

Compassion has become such an integral public policy in Louisville that the city’s 2017 progress report includes metrics about it: There was the 9 percent decline in homelessness, the implementation of the Compassionate Schools program to promote empathy and other values in 25 elementary schools.

That same year, the city’s Give a Day week of service inspired 180,000 acts by volunteers. The annual We Walk for Compassion event attracted 2,500 students, who performed a combined 300,000 hours of service.

In an article about a 2016 meeting in the U.S. with mayors Tait and Fischer, the Dalai Lama is quoted on his website (DalaiLama.com) as saying: “I am confident that leaders in the latter part of the century who grow up with a human value based education system will be more compassionate. Then the 21st century can be one of peace and compassion.”

Embrace Aging
Louisville did and is profiting for it

I n a renovated warehouse in downtown Louisville, Kentucky, the Thrive Center offers a showcase for cutting-edge technology related to aging care. The facility is open to companies that want to see demonstrations and to consumers who want to try out gadgets or get a free gait and balance assessment from physical therapy graduate students.

The center is another sign of how Louisville has embraced aging care as an economic opportunity. The city already boasts the nation’s largest concentration of headquarters for companies in various aspects of wellness and aging care. Aging-related businesses contribute more than $50 billion to the Louisville economy and more than 21,000 professional jobs.

It began in the 1960s with Humana, which was a nursing home and hospital operator before becoming a health insurance giant. Along the way, Humana gave a start to several executives who went on to start other companies.

“You end up with a Silicon Valley effect here in the aging space,” explains Benjamin Moore of Louisville Forward, the city’s economic development arm.

By the mid-2000s, Louisville’s aging-care industry had grown so much that the city began to factor the revenues into its economic planning. Long-term care provider Signature Healthcare moved its headquarters to Louisville in 2010. Kindred Healthcare, Atria Senior Living and Almost Family also call Louisville home. The University of Louisville has an Institute for Sustainable Health & Optimal Aging.

After Mayor Greg Fischer took office in 2011, he promoted Louisville as the nation’s lifelong fitness and aging capital even more assertively. “Americans are living longer and staying active later in their lives,” he wrote in American City and County magazine. “The need for targeted services and innovations is growing, and Louisville’s economy will grow along with it.”

A Mayors Tom Tait (center) of Anaheim, California, and Greg Fischer (right) of Louisville, Kentucky, visited the Dalai Lama at his residence in Dharamsala, India.
Welcome Boomers Home
A college town wants to be the first choice of seniors

For decades, Tallahassee, Florida, has been a youthful enclave in America’s grayest state. While Florida boasts the nation’s highest percentage of people age 65 and over, this city of 300,000 includes nearly 70,000 college students at two state universities and a large community college.

Tallahassee likes its student population just fine, but the city wants people who are relocating in the “third third” of their lives to make the state’s capital region their home, too.

“We’ve got so much to offer relocating boomers,” says Michelle Bono, the volunteer chair of Choose Tallahassee, a nonprofit, volunteer-led organization created by civic leaders to market the northern Florida city to boomers nationwide.

“Imagine living in a beautiful, warm, livable, welcoming community where the cost of living is reasonable; health care is excellent and easily accessible; you can get anywhere in a half-hour’s drive; and there’s a fun cultural activity almost every weekend. We find that once people discover us, they love Tallahassee.”

Prospective residents find a Southern-flavored city with a mild, no-snow, four-season climate that’s very different from the flat, steamy and swampy environs of more famous Florida cities, including Orlando, Tampa and Miami.

Built on rolling hills, Tallahassee’s cityscape is shaded by so many moss-draped live oaks, pines and laurel oaks that, viewed from atop the 22-story state Capitol building, the city disappears under its beloved trees. With the sprawling Apalachicola National Forest on the city’s doorstep and an award-winning parks and greenway system, there’s plenty to do outdoors. And the Gulf is 45 minutes away.

But why work to bring boomers on board? “We see terrific opportunities for them to add value to our community,” Bono explains. “Boomers volunteer in larger numbers than any other age cohort. They bring a lifetime of experience. And, let’s face it, having thousands of boomers move here would be a big economic gain for us as well.”

The Choose Tallahassee initiative began in 2011, as rounds of state-government layoffs hit Florida’s capital city. While the region’s other major industry (academia) is thriving, that could change with the popularity of distance learning. Downstate Florida communities prospered by attracting older residents. Tallahassee believes the time is right to do the same.

“We’re delighted to welcome boomers to Tallahassee,” says City Commissioner Gil Ziffer, an enthusiastic supporter of the initiative. “So many of us came here for an education or a job and fell in love with the community.”

April brings the annual Word of South festival, which is described as featuring “authors who write about music, musicians who also are authors, authors and musicians appearing together, and everything in between.”

A golfer prepares to swing at the ninth annual Capital City Senior Games, which are hosted by Tallahassee’s Department of Parks, Recreation & Neighborhood Affairs and the Tallahassee Senior Center.

During his career with the federal government, Princeton-educated engineer Fred Weinhold served in Washington under four U.S. presidents. He also worked on the development of a nuclear-powered U.S. Navy for Adm. Hyman G. Rickover and was part of the team that helped establish the U.S. Department of Energy in the late 1970s.

After all that, he served as the head of research and development for the Tennessee Valley Authority. Now retired, Weinhold lives near Chattanooga, Tennessee, and has a different, but still important, mission.

As a volunteer counselor for the Chattanooga branch of SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives), a resource partner of the U.S. Small Business Administration, Weinhold uses his organizational expertise to help local entrepreneurs get their ventures off the ground. His specialty is advising community groups on how to set up 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporations, enabling them to apply for foundation grants and government funding.

“For a long time, if you wanted to get an Internal Revenue Service determination letter to be a nonprofit, you had to submit a 30-page application,” Weinhold explains. “It took a year, and a lot of people would have to spend thousands of dollars on a lawyer.”

But the IRS came up with an online process for organizations with less than $50,000 in annual revenue, he adds. “If you’ve got a computer and somebody to coach you, you can apply in an hour, and in a couple of weeks you can get an answer, which is almost always yes.”

Weinhold says his volunteer work does pay. “It gives me a chance to be out with people who are active and working in the world. It’s important to me to stay involved with the community.”

| SCORE volunteer Fred Weinhold, one of his clients, and a business banker at the Tennessee Valley Federal Credit Union. |

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Deploy the talents of professionals and volunteers of all ages

When the government of Detroit, Michigan, made fighting urban blight a priority a few years ago, it discovered that families losing their homes to foreclosure was a key reason for the crisis.

One approach to tackling the issue was to launch an outreach campaign in which volunteers combed the city, seeking out residents at risk and educating them about how to avoid foreclosure. The effort is credited with helping 3,700 families keep their homes.

The work was led by Victoria Kovari, the city’s chief service officer, appointed by Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan in 2016. Kovari’s position was funded through a $100,000 grant from Cities of Service. Created in 2009 by then–New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the nonprofit promotes a model of citizen engagement in which people contribute their time and labor, while collaborating with city officials to identify problems and brainstorm how to solve them.

Cities of Service has grown to include more than 200 cities across the United States and in the United Kingdom. The organization also provides grants to cities for specific initiatives, offers intensive consulting and technical assistance, and connects cities that have or have had analogous challenges so they can share expertise.

Encore.org, a similarly service-minded nonprofit, spearheads efforts to “engage millions of people in later life as a vital source of talent,” with the ultimate goal of creating “a better future for young people and future generations.”

Sometimes, the two organizations overlap — as they did in Miami, Florida, for Kevin Vericker (below). In other places, the efforts complement one another, as was true for the work done by Dima Khoury (at right) in San Jose, California.

Both efforts connect skilled volunteers and paid fellows with high-impact work opportunities that help make communities more livable for people of all ages.

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

Hire a Problem Solver
And get resources for improving high school graduation rates

During his four-decade IT career, Kevin Vericker was employed by some of the biggest names in the business (HP, SAS, IBM). His work often involved serving public-sector clients, such as government agencies and the World Bank.

“My job was figuring out how we could apply analytic software to solving public-sector problems,” he explains.

In his free time, Vericker volunteered in programs that helped street kids or promoted education. So as he neared retirement, he became intrigued by an opportunity that would allow him to use his expertise while helping his community. He accepted an Encore Fellowship and went to work for the city of Miami, Florida, reporting to its chief service officer, Raul Hernandez, on a Cities of Service–supported effort to improve student performance.

Vericker compiled a comprehensive portfolio of community resources — from tutoring to scholarships and mentoring programs — along with impact metrics on student success. His work was turned into a book. “If you’re a teacher, counselor or graduation coach, once you know the circumstances of the student you’re working with, you can go in and see what organizations offer services appropriate for that student,” he explains.

Vericker says his five-month assignment was “invigorating,” in part because the officials he worked with were so committed to helping youth. “I found myself getting up at 6 a.m. to beat the traffic and get to work early.”

Hire a Go-Getter
And get talented retirees to become intergenerational volunteers

When Dima Khoury retired in 2014 after spending nearly two decades at Cisco, where she served as director of software engineering, she says she “wanted to do something in the community, something more impactful.”

Khoury found that opportunity by joining Encore.org’s Generation to Generation campaign, an effort aimed at getting older adults to interact more with young people. Hired as an Encore Fellow, Khoury was assigned to work in the office of San Jose, California, Mayor Sam Liccardo to help increase the participation of people age 50 and over in volunteering programs.

San Jose “has a lot of kids who are not reaching their potential,” Khoury explains. “At the same time, we have people who are retiring from Silicon Valley companies who have experience, wisdom and the time to contribute, but we’re not really leveraging them.”

About her assignments, Khoury says: “I thought of it like a product campaign.”

She worked with programs that needed volunteers to refine their messaging. To connect with recent retirees, she urged the programs to emphasize the flexibility of the time commitment. “People want to put in the time, but they want to be able to take time off to travel,” she explains. “You have to let them know that isn’t a problem.”

The campaign set a goal of recruiting 1,000 volunteers and engaging with a half-dozen youth-serving organizations. After just six months, the campaign had secured 700 volunteers and 15 youth-serving organizations.

Khoury says that through the campaign she has “discovered a passion for intergenerational work, working with kids and adults to better lives.” A big difference from her career in high tech, she says, is that “instead of talking about products, and to the brains of people, I was talking to hearts to get to minds.”

EXPERIENCE MATTERS

Dima Khoury (second from right) with San Jose Mayor Sam Liccardo and her daughters Rawan and Natalie.

Kevin Vericker (back row, right) with his city of Miami colleagues.
The Future City Competition is an annual educational event that challenges middle school students to use their knowledge and interest in science, technology, engineering and math to improve the world. The teens and preteens are tasked with choosing a location anywhere on the globe and then researching, conceiving, designing and building a tabletop model of what the city could be like 100 or more years in the future.

(When looking at the photographs shown here, keep in mind that each team could spend no more than $100 on supplies, so recycling and repurposing household items was key. You’ll recognize some of the recyclables. Hint: Empty pill bottles make great apartment towers.)

For the 2018 competition, the theme was “Age-Friendly Cities.” The teams — which came from throughout the U.S. as well as Canada, China, Egypt, Nigeria and elsewhere — were instructed to identify an age-related challenge in today’s urban environment and engineer two innovative solutions that would allow the older adults in their “future city” to enjoy active and independent lives.

First place went to the Mid-Atlantic Region team from the Edlin School in Reston, Virginia. The team incorporated the concept of “healthy aging” by designing “smart homes” equipped with noninvasive sensors to track a resident’s vital signs and detect falls and even early symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease. Team members envisioned “Healthy Happy Hours,” when older adults would be encouraged to eat healthy foods, socialize and talk about the city’s history with younger people.

The second-place team, from St. John Lutheran School in Rochester, Michigan, imagined personal “AmphiPod” vehicles that would operate on land and water and could glide up the sides of buildings, maximizing accessibility and linking to an elevated public transit system. “Access is easy-in, easy-out,” explained the young visionaries. “And living space is expanded since AmphiPods act as mini balconies!”

Another bit of important future lingo: “Originals,” according to the Homedale, Idaho, students representing the Idaho Region, will be the respectful and preferred term for the people we now refer to as “older adults,” “the elderly” and/or “senior citizens.”

Presented by the Mid-Atlantic Region team, the city of Halona, formerly Richmond, Virginia, received the competition’s first-place prize — a trip to Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama, and $7,500 for the Reston, Virginia-based Edlin School’s STEM program. Halona’s AARP building is the third skyscraper from the left in the back row.

A The residents of Idunn Eir, formerly known as Oslo, Norway, live in multigenerational complexes that combine ground-level commercial and community spaces with housing units above. "Traditional housing did not adequately support aging in place," explains the team from the all-girls Ellis School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. "Conventional housing design included high-risk environments such as unsafe bathrooms, dangerous kitchens, and narrow doorways and hallways." (P.S. See the recycled pill bottles? The black balconies are created from ponytail bands.)

At the Intergenerational Complex for Education, located in a future version of Adelaide, Australia, retirement facilities and schools are commingled. "Each complex has its own specialty," students from the Academy for Science and Foreign Language in Huntsville, Alabama, write. "Retirees may choose to live in the complex of their expertise where they share their knowledge while interacting with the younger generations." The Alabama Region team placed third in the competition, winning $2,000 for its school’s STEM program.

Writing about the future city of Happyville, North Carolina, students from Chicago’s St. Paul of the Cross School, representing the Illinois Region, explain that “back in the 21st century,” older people “felt isolated from other Happians because it was difficult getting from place to place and taxing to comfortably use public transit.” Among the team’s solutions: a soft, stretchy exoskeleton — essentially a wearable robot that provides “endurance and strength to the wearer.” Paired with “suction shoes,” the ensemble enables users to stay “completely mobile, balanced, and on their own two feet.”

KRR PHOTOGRAPHY FOR DISCOVERE (3)
MATT ROTH (2)
This list of grant recipients — 88 in all — in our first-ever community challenge is organized by state and then city, followed by the name of the grantee organization. (See page 7 if you skipped over our initial explanation of the challenge.) A page number is provided if the project or community appears in this edition of Where We Live. Three additional projects not listed below but featured in this book (Fort Worth, Texas, page 46, Fort Wayne, Indiana, pages 40 and 104, and Buffalo, New York, page 106) received support from AARP and the urban planners of Team Better Block.* An asterisk indicates that a video about the challenge project can be found by visiting AARP.org/CommunityChallenge.

**ALABAMA**

Birmingham: REV Birmingham — The nonprofit, its partners and stakeholders conducted pop-up demonstration projects to show how improved street safety and traffic flow for vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians was achieved in a residential area of Birmingham. (Page 126)

Mobile: Victory Teaching Farm — The Center for Family and Community Development installed ramps and raised garden beds so people of all ages and abilities can participate in farm activities.

**ALASKA**

Anchorage: Alaska Trails — Grant funds helped involve residents in decisions to improve the built environment and create active transportation options for people of all ages and ability levels.

**ARIZONA**

Chino Valley: Yavapai Regional Intergenerational Park — The grant was used to install a multi-use ADA-compliant walkway, bench and bus stop shelter. (Page 46)

Phoenix: Chicanos Por La Causa — Funding was provided for the installation of a crosswalk near a busy, six-lane intersection in the city’s Maryvale neighborhood.

**ARKANSAS**

Fayetteville: Sources for Community Independent Living Services — An open house educational event was held to raise awareness among residents and landlords about the importance of lifelong housing options and accessible housing for all.

**CALIFORNIA**

Fontana: City of Fontana — Funding was provided to purchase materials in support of Fontana Walks, an initiative that encourages residents of all ages to walk a collective “2 Billion Steps” (or 1 million miles) in 365 days.

San Diego: Consumer Advocates for RICE Reform — CARR created a board game called Boomercology to engage older adults in making San Diego an age-friendly city. (Page 95)

Santa Cruz: Habitat for Humanity Monterey Bay — The grant helped build an ADA-compliant accessory dwelling unit (ADU) as part of a program that enables older homeowners to age in place.*

West Sacramento: City of West Sacramento — The grant money was used to purchase pedestrian safety equipment, including thermal imaging and installing pedestrian-controlled crosswalk buttons near a housing development occupied by older adults. (Page 37)

**COLORADO**

Colorado Springs: Innovations in Aging Collaborative — Funds were provided for an Intercity Intergenerational Crosswalk Street to Walk Day event to spur community engagement and interaction among residents of all ages.

Wheat Ridge: Localworks — By showcasing the work of the Avocate 38 Coalition through a neighborhood event, the community learned about safe, nonmotorized ways to navigate the neighborhood, which has a downtown Main Street-type destination. (Page 24)

**CONNECTICUT**

Hartford: Knox Inc. — Staff and volunteers rebuilt the Broad Street Community Garden’s raised beds so the planters could be used by children, older adults and people with disabilities. (Page 61)

**DELAWARE**

Dover: City of Dover — Grant funds financed signage along walking paths to promote the reopening of a long-closed trail. (Page 107)

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

Washington, D.C.: Van Ness Main Street — This long-term project brought together older adults and millennials to create a new public space for all ages of people. (Page 76)

**FLORIDA**

Charlotte Bay: Town of Cutler Bay Parks and Recreation — Accessible fitness equipment was purchased and installed under a shade canopy in a park that hosts activities for older adults. (Page 55)

Fort Myers: Streets Alive of Southwest Florida (Lee County) — Grant monies were used to host a fun, educational Open Streets demonstration event in a low-income neighborhood that has little infrastructure, high bicycle dependency and high crash rates.

St. Petersburg: Florida Greenways Connection Network Foundation — On an October Sunday in 2017, Central Avenue was closed to cars and opened to fun for an Open Streets event.

**GEORGIA**

Macon: South Macon Arts Revitalization Technology, Inc. — Outdoor sculptures and gardeners tables and a Connect Four game were purchased and installed on the grounds of a planned community center. (Page 112)*

Union City: Christian City, Inc. — Funds helped expand Northport’s Senior Wellness Program create ways for residents to engage in fitness activities.

**HAWAII**

Honolulu: Age-Friendly Honolulu, Hawaii Pacific University — The grant supported a public awareness campaign to educate businesses and other organizations on how to better serve older adults. (Page 98)

Honolulu: Age-Friendly Honolulu, Hawaii Pacific University — Grant funds helped educate young people about the importance of age-friendly cities through an interactive exhibit at the Children and Youth Day events held at the Hawaii State Capitol.

**IDAHO**

Kuna: Idaho Smart Growth — On Oct. 13, 2017, the Kuna Family Parking Lot in downtown Kuna was transformed into a pop-up plaza project that demonstrated the benefits of public gathering places. (Page 108)*

**ILLINOIS**

Batavia: Batavia Main Street — A one-day event educated residents about mobility from different perspectives, including walking, bicycling, pushing a stroller and traveling in a wheelchair.

Wilmette: Go Green Wilmette — Volunteers and advocates demonstrated active transportation options and infrastructure by using Go Green Wilmette’s Go-up supplies’ tool kit. (Page 41)

**INDIANA**

 Kokomo: YMCA of Kokomo: More than a dozen wayfinding signs were created and installed along the City-Line Trolley route and the Walk Rail Connector Trail. (Page 31)

**IOWA**

Carlisle: City of Carlisle — To help create a more walkable and attractive community, the city installed 10 benches, 10 planters, eight bicycle racks and a bicycle launch mount for its trails and historic downtown.

**KANSAS**

Wichita: Wichita Public Library Foundation — The library and Bike Walk Wichita participated in Wichita’s Open Streets event on September 24, 2017, by launching three walking tours through the PocketStreets app. The tours were accessible and navigable for people with varying degrees of mobility. (Page 100)*

**KENTUCKY**

Bowling Green: WKU Aging Center for Gerontology — Funds were granted to develop a mural by alumni of the Over Fifty Academy (a leadership academy for older adults) for an Age-Friendly Bowling Green effort and Comparisons of Respected Elders, a student group at Western Kentucky University.

Lexington: Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government — ADA-accessible benches were placed in a U-shaped, conversation-friendly configuration in Idle Hour Park.*

**LOUISIANA**

New Orleans: PliLot — The construction of a foribridge and walking path connected this community fitness park to the Lafitte Greenway, an age-friendly city trail and a pedestrian path. In addition, PliLot coaches provided more than 36 hours of free fitness coaching to older people from a community that suffers from one of the largest health disparity gaps in the nation. (Page 55)

**MAINE**

Belfast: Belfast Area Age-Friendly — The grant was used to produce a display and kit featuring tools and household accessories that can make a home safer and help prevent falls.

Bowdoinham: Advisory Committee on Aging — Grant funds were used to construct a new community fitness park to the Lafitte Greenway, an age-friendly city trail and a pedestrian path. In addition, PliLot coaches provided more than 36 hours of free fitness coaching to older people from a community that suffers from one of the largest health disparity gaps in the nation. (Page 55)

**MASSACHUSETTS**

Natick: Metropolitan Area Planning Council — The council developed a prototype of a mobile app to address the specific mobility, recreational and logistical needs of older adults so they could use local off-road trails. (Page 56)

Stoneham: Boys & Girls Clubs of Stoneham & Wakefield — Grant funds were used to build an intergenerational community garden.

**MICHIGAN**

Bossemere: City of Bossemere — Artistic bicycle stands were installed to provide secure bike parking and encourage people to pedal rather than drive.

Wayne: Wayne Ripple Effect — An underutilized alleyway owned by the city was transformed into a gathering and event space.*

**MINNESOTA**

St. Paul: Department of Public Works — The city used crosswalks more visible to roadway users by adding art and creative features and installed, for demonstration purposes, temporary pedestrian safety elements to improve walkability.

St. Paul: District 6 Planning Council — Permanent message centers, used to display multilingual community and events information, were installed along the Rice Street corridor in the North End.

**MISSISSIPPI**

 Gulfport: City of Gulfport — The grant was used to create Park Bark on an acre of property at the low-traffic Brickyard Bayou Park which is located in a part of the city that was devastated during Hurricane Katrina. (Page 116)*

**MISSOURI**

St. Louis: Citizens for Modern Transit — Several demonstration projects were used to build support for the development of improved public transit.*

**MONTANA**

Bozeman: Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University and the City of Bozeman — A mobile tool box for pedestrian safety was created to show how temporary demonstrations can help advocate for long-term solutions. A mobile tool box for pedestrian safety was created to show how temporary demonstrations can help advocate for long-term solutions. A mobile tool box for pedestrian safety was created to show how temporary demonstrations can help advocate for long-term solutions.

**MARYLAND**

Baltimore: Pigtown Main Street — As part of a long-term infrastructure improvement project, a pop-up demonstration park event was held at an intersection in need of safety enhancements. (Page 76)
Great community projects require careful planning and time. These quick action projects give community leaders the motivation and momentum to create greater change.”

— Nancy LeaMond

AARP executive vice president, Community, States and National Affairs, and chief advocacy and engagement officer
Livable Library

Check out our online resources and other printed publications about creating livable communities for people of all ages.

ONLINE

AARP.org/Livable
The award-winning website of AARP Livable Communities is full of information and inspiration for local leaders.

AARP.org/Livable-Archives
This A-Z archive is organized by subject and serves as a gateway to AARP how-to’s, interviews and slideshows all about livability.

AARP.org/Livable-Newsletter
Take a look at back issues of the weekly AARP Livable Communities e-Newsletter and sign up at AARP.org/Livable-Subscribe.

AARP.org/LivableIndex
Curated by the AARP Public Policy Institute, the AARP Livability Index is an interactive tool that lets the user calculate a livability number for any city, county, town, address or zip code in the United States.

AARP.org/AgeFriendly
Learn how your community can join the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities — and see which towns, cities, counties and states are already enrolled.

PUBLICATIONS

Where We Live is just one of many free publications in the AARP Livable Communities collection. Learn all that’s available by visiting AARP.org/Livable-Communities/Tool-Kits-Resources.

About the Author

As AARP’s chief advocacy and engagement officer, Nancy LeaMond has responsibility for driving the organization’s social mission on behalf of Americans 50-plus and their families.

Nancy leads government affairs and legislative campaigns for AARP, widely seen as one of the most powerful advocacy organizations in the country. She also manages public education programs, community engagement, multicultural outreach and AARP’s network of 18,000 volunteers.

Nancy’s team includes 650 staff members across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. She leads major AARP issue areas, campaigns, and initiatives such as AARP’s Livable Communities work, a multipronged effort to help residents and local leaders turn their communities into great places to live for people of all ages.

A strong component of this work is sharing great ideas through the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities, an award-winning e-newsletter, and in three editions of Where We Live: Communities for All Ages.

Nancy has led several landmark campaigns for AARP, including the successful 2017 effort to maintain the promise of Medicare and protect older Americans and their families from having to pay more in premiums and out-of-pocket costs or face reduced coverage.

Other campaigns demanded that candidates for national office commit to addressing challenges facing Social Security and Medicare, fought major home energy-cost increases, and put health care and financial security at the top of the country’s agenda.

Nancy has been named by The Hill as one of the “Top Lobbyists” every year since 2011. In 2016 she received the What’s Next Boomer Business Innovation Award for Vision, Leadership and Integrity, and she was named one of Next Avenue’s 2017 Influencers in Aging. Nancy is a member of the United States Conference of Mayors Business Council Steering Committee.

In addition, Nancy is a nationally recognized leader on health, retirement security and other issues important to older Americans. Before joining AARP, Nancy served as the chief of staff and assistant U.S. trade representative for congressional affairs at the Office of the United States Trade Representative.

Nancy worked extensively on health care and pension issues before entering the trade field, and beginning her career in the Public Health Service, the Medicaid program and the Department of Commerce.

Nancy also served in the Office of Management and Budget, the Department of Education and on Capitol Hill as chief of staff for a senior member of Congress.

Nancy holds a bachelor’s degree from Smith College and a master’s degree in public policy and city planning from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Follow Nancy on Twitter @NancyLeaMond

About the Editor

Melissa Stanton is a senior advisor for AARP Livable Communities and the editor of AARP.org/Livable, the award-winning AARP Livable Communities e-Newsletter and various AARP Livable Communities resources and publications.

Before joining AARP, Melissa spent more than a decade at Time Inc., where she was a senior editor at LIFE and People magazines and was the editor-in-chief of several books and special issues. Before that, she was the chief of reporters for 7 Days, an award-winning weekly about New York City.

Melissa is the author of two books, and her freelance articles have been published by the New York Times, The Atlantic, Glamour and other media outlets. She is a graduate of Fordham University and the City University of New York/Hunter College, from which she holds a master’s degree in public health. Melissa speaks on behalf of AARP Livable Communities at conferences and meetings nationwide.

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The AARP Roadmap to Livability Collection features six workbooks with strategies and solutions that make a community great for people of all ages. The free collection is available for download or ordering at AARP.org/LivabilityRoadmap.
Located in a very remote region of the Navajo Nation in northeastern Arizona, the Tolani Lake Senior Center provides tribe elders with company, conversation, hot meals and a welcoming place to spend the day.

Between 2010 and 2050 the number of Americans age 85 and over will increase from 5 million to 18 million. Living longer means that the Experienced Class — the men and women who enhance our communities through their skills and life lessons, influence and involvement — can contribute to our lives and where we live for even longer. Having lived through and seen so much, they are a rich resource. Their experience matters. That said, members of this group also need support from the communities where they live. When local leaders and residents nationwide work to make their communities more livable, everyone benefits. And older adults are able to live, play, work and volunteer in the same neighborhoods and on the same streets where people of all ages do the same.

LET’S STAY IN TOUCH

Tell Us About Your Community
Complete a short online questionnaire at AARP.org/SharingLivableSolutions telling us about your community’s projects, initiatives and solutions. We may be able to highlight the work by writing about it for our website, our weekly e-newsletter or one of our publications, such as a future edition of Where We Live.

Subscribe to the AARP Livable Communities e-Newsletter
To keep up with our resources and continue to learn from communities across the nation, sign up for our free, award-winning e-newsletter at AARP.org/Livable-Subscribe.

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MELISSA STANTON, AARP
From the introduction to *Where We Live: Communities for All Ages 100+ Inspiring Examples from America’s Local Leaders*, the third book in the AARP Where We Live series

“Some of the best ideas borrow from and build on what has been tried and tested someplace else. Learning what others are doing could be just the spark needed to make a difference where you live.”

Praise for the 2018 edition of *Where We Live*

“The demography of our cities is and always will be a major factor of the decisions we make as mayors and the ways in which we engage with our communities. I’m grateful for the leadership and expertise of AARP as they’ve guided us in best practices and streamlined several processes for improving the lives of our aging population. As our cities grow and age, we will be prepared to put forth the best and most appropriate practices for our residents.”

— Steve Benjamin, mayor, Columbia, South Carolina

“Where We Live shows how, when you create a great city for an 8-year-old and an 80-year-old, you are creating a successful city for all people, 0 to over 100. I commend Nancy LeaMond and AARP for publishing this book to highlight the work that communities are doing and the power of the Experienced Class in neighborhoods, towns and cities.”

— Gil Penalosa, founder and chair, 8 80 Cities

Praise for the first edition of *Where We Live*

“Where We Live provides an organized set of ideas to spark change in communities across the country. This book shows how mayors in cities big, small, rural and urban have found countless ways to improve their communities for their aging population and all residents.”

— Mick Cornett, former mayor, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

WHERE YOU LIVE could be featured in the next edition of *WHERE WE LIVE*

Tell us about your community’s inspiring livability work. AARP.org/InspirationalSolutions

Learn more and stay informed year-round by subscribing to the free, award-winning AARP Livable Communities e-Newsletter. AARP.org/Livable-Subscribe

WHERE WE LIVE 2018 EDITION

100+ INSPIRING EXAMPLES FROM AMERICA’S LOCAL LEADERS

PLUS: How the Experienced Class enhances communities through its skills and life lessons, influence and involvement

WHERE WE LIVE 100+ INSPIRING EXAMPLES FROM AMERICA’S LOCAL LEADERS 2018 EDITION

BY Nancy LeaMond AARP EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, COMMUNITY, STATE AND NATIONAL AFFAIRS | EDITED BY MELISSA STANTON

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